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A Contending Logics Perspective on Employer Branding in a Technology Service Company in Korea

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MSc

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore how employer branding in an organization in Korea is understood and constructed by its employees. Three focal research questions are raised: (1) ‘how do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?’ (2) ‘which actors are the most influential in the employees’ perceptions of employer branding? & why?’ and (3) ‘how does the organization mediate societal logics and employees’ perceptions as a sensegiver?’

Drawing on a social constructionist approach through semi-structured interviews with employees and managers of a Korean organization, ‘growth obsession’ and ‘immanent individualism’ are identified as contradictory dimensions in employees’ perceptions of employer branding. The coexistence of these contradictory dimensions is understood in terms of contending logics of growth and individualism at the societal level. Employees’ growth obsession shows how deeply employees’ perceptions of employer branding are embedded in the dominant logic of growth. Immanent individualism reflects the coexistence of the growth logic and the alternative logic of individualism, and suggests employees’ agentive capacity in making sense of their organization’s employer branding.

This thesis also points out that the organization’s role as a sensegiver is limited, in contrast to the assumption, dominant in the existing literature, of employer branding as an employer-driven strategy.

The main theoretical contributions of the thesis lie in extending employer branding literature by illuminating it from the perspective of contending logics. This approach shows how employees’ perceptions of employer branding are tightly coupled with societal logics, and suggests considering the possibility of employees’ agency in enacting or rejecting the implications of these logics. Despite limitations in terms of generalizability, a rich and deep-rooted understanding of employer branding, situated in the context of the organization in Korea, is expected to provide a springboard for a more contextualized approach to employer branding both in the academic area and in practice.

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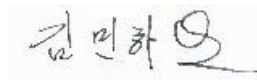
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '김민하' (Kim Minha) followed by a stylized flourish.

Printed name

Minha Kim

ABBREVIATIONS

AID	Act for International Development
CEO	Chief executive officer
CLT	Culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory
CR	Corporate Relations
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EB	Employer branding
EOI	Export-oriented industrialization
EPB	Economic Planning Board
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	Human Resource
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICT	Information and communication technology
IM	Internal marketing
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KISDI	Korea Information Society Development Institute
LTE	Long Term Evolution
NBS	National Business System
PC	Psychological contract
RBV	Resource based view
SIT	Social identity theory
SOE	State-owned enterprise

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

“We live on [organizational] growth. Growth is rice for us. This is the dream that keeps employees growing” [employee 10 of T Telecom].

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Background to the research

About two decades have passed since employer branding was suggested, by Ambler and Barrow (1996), as an independent academic and practical concept that integrates human resource management (HRM) and marketing. In the intervening years, employer branding has come to be seen as an important part of human resource (HR) strategy and practice in major organizations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin & Beaumont, 2003; Martin & Cerdin, 2014; Martin & Hetrick, 2009; Schultz, Antorini & Csaba, 2005). Defining employer branding as packages of benefits provided by the employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) or as a company's efforts to communicate these benefits (Lloyd, 2002), employer branding studies have focused on identifying factors of employer attractiveness among prospective employees (e.g. Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010) or validating the relationship between employer branding image and application intention (e.g. Baum & Kabst, 2013; Knox & Freeman, 2006).

Much of this literature is heavily functionalist, managerialist and unitarist in its assumptions, and often context-free in its approach to best practice (Aggerholm, Andersen & Thomsen, 2011; Francis & Reddington, 2012; Martin & Cerdin, 2014). This dominant tendency in the employer branding literature, as these critics argued, has led to the treatment of employees as 'consumers' buying into their employer's propositions and practices. Also, it suffers from failure to address the question as to what [societal] context is favourable to the effectiveness of employer branding (Martin, 2008).

In this respect, the employer branding literature reiterates a tendency prevalent in the corporate branding approach, and has been criticized as following a

‘myth’ that the mere adoption of branding automatically mobilizes employees to be engaged with their organization (Schultz et al., 2005). In short, although the existent employer branding studies have illuminated employer branding as management practice, they have failed to fully address two central issues of employer branding, i.e. complexity of the employment experience and contextuality (Edwards, 2013; Lievens, 2007).

This failure is crucial as employees’ perceptions cannot be uncovered without proper consideration of them as active parties (Tarnovskaya, 2011). Furthermore, scholars from a critical perspective have argued that employees are not simply “passive receptacles for management ideas or corporate ‘mono-cultures’” (Francis, 2002, 2007; Grant & Shields, 2002; Keenoy, 2009 cited in Francis & Reddington, 2012: 263). In addition, critical studies have insisted that employer branding can properly be understood only in a wider social, economic, political and cultural context (e.g. Wong, Sullivan, Blazey, Tamkin & Pearson, 2009).

To fill this gap, the thesis views employer branding from an institutional logics perspective which links macro and micro levels of analysis (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012). The use of this new perspective in the employer branding area allows a more dynamic understanding of employer branding, focusing on the relationship between contexts and individuals. It shows how institutions at the societal level are reproduced by employees in respect of employer branding. At the same time, it shows how employees translate societal logics. Thus, the thesis demonstrates a mutually-constituted relationship between individuals and institutions.

In re-examining these two limitations of the existing employer branding literature, Korea¹, where employer branding has been adopted relatively recently, provides a particularly useful context and allows convincing conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, it provides a strong case of institutional influences on employer branding. Secondly, it is clear that there is increasing need for more nuanced understanding of Korean employees rather than seeing them as either politically weak and docile (e.g. Deyo, 1989) or recalcitrant and

¹Korea in this thesis refers to South Korea.

resentful(e.g. Koo, 2001) (Kim, 2013). Lastly, the employer branding concept – which in this thesis undergoes extension to comprehend multiple levels of analysis – is a useful framework with which to get a thorough understanding of the Korean context, which has been passing through a transformational period (Lee, 1998; Lee & Trim, 2008).

Research aims and research questions

Thus, the aims of the thesis are twofold, as follows:

1. To extend the scope of employer branding research from its present concern with meso-level analysis, focusing solely on the organization, into multiple levels of analysis including macro, meso and micro levels. In doing so, I aim to further develop employer branding as a concept that addresses the structure - agency issue.
2. To do so, I seek to demonstrate how employer branding research can benefit from a more sociological approach by drawing on an institutional logics analytical framework and a social constructionist approach to methodology.

These aims are achieved by addressing the following focal research questions:

Research Question 1. How do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?

Research Question 2. Which actors are the most influential in the employees' perceptions of employer branding? & Why?

Research Question 3. How does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver?

Justification for the research

By way of answering the questions, this thesis can make some contributions to the employer branding area in both theoretical and practical terms, as outlined below:

1. The thesis illustrates employer branding from the perspective of employees based on a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Data on how employees understood and constructed the employer branding

of their organization emerged in their own words, with minimum level of direct prompt from the researcher. The data thus elicited vividly illustrated the significant influence of societal context on employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding. These naturally occurring data have an independent value which allows us to question the dominant deterministic approach to national or societal context and thus provide compelling evidence of a linkage of micro-macro levels operating in the area of employer branding.

2. **Contribution 1** above is reinforced by the adoption of an institutional approach, specifically a contending logics perspective (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta & Lounsbury, 2011; Hayes & Rajao, 2011; Kodeih & Greenwood, 2014; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Pache & Santos, 2013; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Few studies have considered employer branding in an institutional context. By drawing upon the institutional perspective, the thesis explains the frames of reference operative in employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding. In particular, the contending logics perspective enables us to comprehend the coexistence of multiple and even contradictory institutional logics, i.e. a dominant logic of growth and an alternative logic of individualism, thus yielding a dynamic understanding of context. Moreover, the contending logics approach extends the scope of our understanding of employer branding, from its original conception as a one-sided functionalist, managerial, unitarist and context-free stance treating employees as "passive receptacles for management ideas or corporate 'mono-cultures'" (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Francis & Reddington, 2012: 263; Martin & Cerdin, 2014) into an approach enlightened by social constructionist, critical, pluralist and contextual insights.
3. The contending logics approach is effective in addressing the third contribution of the current thesis, the explicit discussion of the hybridity of the context of Korea. Specifically, two contending logics, i.e. the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism are identified as having some traction at the societal level in Korea. Korea provides a rich context to study employer branding based on the contending logics approach

since it has a dynamic history of rapid economic development, crisis and recovery, and state institutions have played active roles in the process (Kim, 2010; Redding & Witt, 2010). In addition, despite the eventful and representative character of its development history, our knowledge on its current situation is still limited, particularly from the employees' perspective (Kim & Park, 2003).

4. The paradox of legitimacy and differentiation exemplifies the dynamics of two contending logics. The current thesis shows how the dilemma between legitimacy and differentiation works in the context of employees. This is noteworthy since the existing understanding of the dilemma has been confined to the macro-meso level relationship, which organizations supposedly strategically balance pressure from institutions and market. What the thesis reveals is that the dilemma also influences employees as well. That is, when legitimacy was satisfied through high organizational growth, differentiation through non-hierarchical organizational culture was appreciated, however, when the former was not met, the latter was rejected by some employees.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is composed of seven chapters as described below:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature surrounding employer branding. Firstly, I show how the existing employer branding literature has been dominated by a marketing perspective while another definition, coming out of organizational studies traditions, has been ignored. Secondly, I examine the philosophical foundations and theoretical underpinnings of employer branding, as a basis on which to extend the scope of employer branding. I analyse the relevant literature in terms of four themes, based on Burrell and Morgan (1979), and on this basis, a philosophically founded and multi-disciplinary perspective on employer branding is proposed.

In chapter 3, I describe my methodology in the thesis. Firstly I examine the philosophical underpinnings of research by discussing social constructionism. The

chapter then turns to issue of case study research before outlining the details of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 is a short chapter describing the national and organizational contexts in which this research is located. A history of Korea and the central roles played by its state institutions in its development are sketched, together with the case company's history and culture, to situate the case.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research. The chapter is divided into three sub-chapters according to research questions they address. The first sub-chapter concerns the first research question, *'how do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?'* The second sub-chapter deals with the second research question *'which actors are the most influential in the employees' perceptions of employer branding? & Why?'* The final sub-chapter deals with the final research question *'how does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver?'*

In chapter 6, I discuss and analyse the findings presented in Chapter 5. In the first section of this discussion, existing concepts dealing with national or societal context are discussed critically in terms of determinism and the nature of historical and structural considerations. Secondly, the embeddedness and agency of individual and organizational levels into two contending logics at the societal level, i.e. the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism, is discussed.

Chapter 7 draws the thesis together by highlighting the principal conclusions. It then turns to the implications the research has for practice. Subsequently the limitations of the research are presented before suggesting areas for further research.

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter introduction

Employer branding is thought to have played an important part in human resource management (HRM) strategy and practice in global organizations in recent decades (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin & Beaumont, 2003; Martin & Hetrick, 2009, Martin, Gollan & Grigg, 2011). Bringing together elements of marketing, branding, and communications with organizational behavior and HR theory, employer branding has generated interest as an integrative approach to effective people management, value creation and organizational legitimacy (Martin, Beaumont, Doig & Pate, 2005).

However, most existing employer branding literature has treated employer branding as unilateral transmission of intended messages from employers to employees (Aggerholm et al., 2011). It neglects two important aspects: (a) employer branding as a socially constructed concept and (b) the employee's role as agency in that process.

Thus, this chapter aims to reveal those gaps in existing employer branding literature and seek grounds for a new perspective which (a) treats employer branding as socially constructed and (b) takes account of employee as well as employer. These aims are informed by this thesis' focal research questions:

How do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea? (Research question 1)

Which actors are the most influential in the employees' perceptions of employer branding? & Why? (Research question 2)

How does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver? (Research question 3)

The chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, definitions of employer branding are reviewed in terms of marketing and organizational studies perspectives and the skewed landscape of definition in the existing employer branding literature is illustrated. The second section deals with philosophical

foundations and theoretical underpinnings of the employer branding idea as groundwork for acquiring better understanding of it. Based on these, the last section attempts to establish a new perspective of employer branding as an employee's social construction. Employer branding and adjacent literature are reviewed in terms of four themes: (a) ontological assumptions of employer branding (b) epistemological assumptions of employer branding (c) societal influence on employer branding and (d) employee's role in employer branding. Thereafter, the chapter attempts to develop a philosophically founded and multi-disciplinary understanding of employer branding.

Groundwork Review: Definition, paradigms of social science & theoretical underpinnings

In extending the definitional scope and actors in employer branding, a more in-depth approach in terms of philosophical foundations and theories should be made. As a framework for a systematic approach to philosophical foundations of employer branding, Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms are examined and adopted. Then the theoretical underpinnings of existing employer branding literature and this thesis are reviewed in the following sections.

Definition of employer branding: Limitation and potentials

Employer branding has attracted the interest in practitioners and academia in the aftermath of the 'war for talent' in the 1990s in the West. Thus, it has been primarily associated with attracting prospective employees. However, with the onset of a recession and global financial crisis in most economies since 2007, the focus of employer branding has gradually changed from external marketing for the attraction of new talent to its internal marketing role of enlisting higher levels of identification and engagement with the organization (CIPD, 2009).

In understanding existing definitions of employer branding, Edwards' (2010) classification of three perspectives on employer branding is helpful.

The first perspective is Ambler and Barrow's (1996: 187) early attempt at a definition from a marketing perspective that employer branding is an employers' offering to employees in terms of "the package of functional, economic and

psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.” Their definition has been accepted as dominant one. For example, among thirty employer branding studies systematically reviewed in the current thesis, twenty studies adopted a specific definition of employer branding and more than half of them (twelve studies including Ambler and Barrow (1996) themselves’) used Ambler and Barrow’s definition.

The definition of employer branding from a communication perspective, which fell into the third categorization of employer branding according to Edwards’ (2010), can be understood as a part of the first perspective since marketing and communication are adjacent areas. Representative definition from the communication perspective is “sum of a company’s efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work” (Lloyd, 2002 cited in Berthon et al., 2005: 153).

On the other hand, the second perspective focusing on the identification of corporate character or personality is closer to the organizational studies tradition (e.g. Davies & Chun, 2002). For example, Martin and Beaumont (2003: 15) defined employer branding as the “company’s image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires.” Dell and Ainspan (2001: 10) proposed that “the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm’s value system, policies and behaviours toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm’s current and potential employees.”

What is noteworthy is that there is difference in epistemological stances within this second group of employer branding definitions. Whereas Dell and Ainspan’s (2001) definition is based on tradition of positivism, Martin and Beaumont’s (2003, referred above) and Martin and colleagues’ (2011: 3618-3619) definition, “a generalised recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high quality employment experience, and a distinctive organisational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others”, are evidently close to that of interpretivist or constructionist. It is also notable from these definitions that various stakeholders including employees in particular, as well as employers are involved in employer branding as evident in Martin et al.’s (2011) definition.

To sum up, employer branding comprehends marketing oriented aspects (i.e. benefits and communication) as well as ideational dimensions of organization (i.e. organizational image and organizational identity). However, the review of employer branding focusing on the definitional landscape reveals two gaps in the existing employer branding literature: (a) a skewed development, dominated by marketing and communication perspectives and (b) a focus on employers' intentions without balanced consideration of the employee's perspective. These gaps in definitions of employer branding reflect a general tendency in employer branding literature, as confirmed through review of a bigger body of the literature of employer branding in a later part of the current chapter.

In an effort to achieve a balanced approach, the current thesis adopts as a working definition one of the second group in Edwards' categorization of existing definitions, "a generalised recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high quality employment experience, and a distinctive organisational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others" (Martin et al., 2011: 3618-3619).

In the remainder of this chapter, I will (a) discuss the underlying philosophical and theoretical bases of different approaches to employer branding so that I can critically reflect on these and (b) seek to extend the scope of employer branding beyond the existing marketing dominated approach.

Four paradigms of social science

Philosophy is a systematic examination of the assumptions and pronouncements underlying specific concepts (Root, 1993). It is generally concerned with three basic questions: what is real? (ontology), what is true? (epistemology) and what is good? (axiology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). This raises questions of assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and the commitments held to particular views. The two aspects of ontology most salient for social science research are realism and relativism (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Realism assumes that the social world is external or detached from an individual's conception. Thus the social world

exists independently from human beings' understanding of it. On the other hand, the relativist position assumes that the social world is defined and experienced differently by different individuals, and this will depend greatly on, for instance, the classes or races to which they belong and the contexts or countries in which they live. Thus there is no single reality that can be discovered, but many perspectives on the issue, which are socially constructed by individuals.

Closely related to ontology is epistemology which is a general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). This relates to the study of "the nature of knowledge" (Schwandt, 2001: 71), "its possibility, scope, and general basis" (Hamlyn 1995: 242). In other words, it is "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998: 3).

Axiology is concerned with the role of personal values and ethics of the researcher in the generation of knowledge (Lewis, Saunders & Thornhill, 2009). Personal values and ethics often combine into a frame of reference or interpretation that shapes how people see the world as it is and the world as they want it to be. Very often, this influences what researchers define as a problem and how research and data collection should be approached.

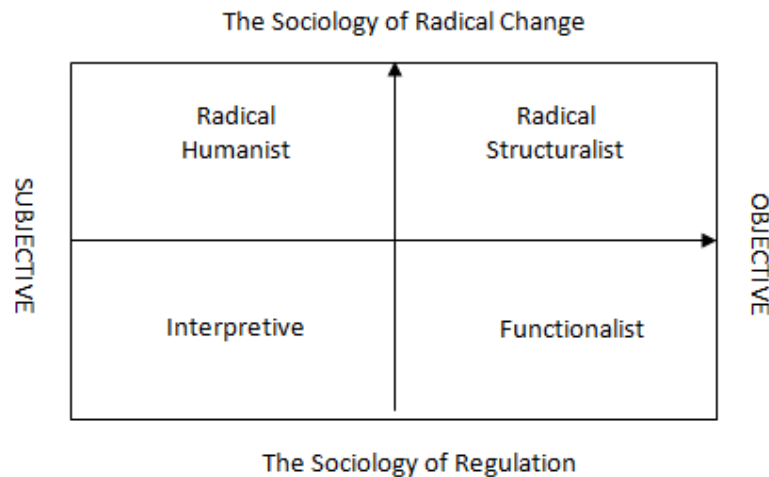
In describing philosophical frameworks informing and guiding researches, the concept of paradigms², introduced by Kuhn (1962), is often used. A primary example of paradigmatic frameworks used in social sciences is the four paradigms developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979). Referring to "the basic belief system or world-view that guides the investigator" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 195 cited in Christians, 2005: 158), paradigms may provide a good map to navigate the multiple theories, thus serving as a useful point of departure for further development of the scope of employer branding (Schultze & Stabell, 2004).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) argued that all approaches to social science are based on interrelated sets of assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. They suggested two key dimensions according to the

²More discussion of paradigm is developed in Methodology chapter.

nature of science (i.e. the subjective-objective dimension) and the nature of society (i.e. the regulation-radical change dimension) and classified social theory into four paradigms: functionalist, interpretive, radical-humanist and radical-structuralist as presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Four Paradigms for the Analysis of Social Theory



Source: Burrell & Morgan (1979: 22)

The functionalist paradigm is built on “the assumption that society has a concrete, real existence, and a systemic character oriented to produce an ordered and regulated state of affairs” (Morgan, 1980: 608). These ontological assumptions lead to a belief that an objective and value-free social science is possible. For this to be achieved, the scientist should dissociate himself or herself with the phenomenon, which he or she is analyzing rigorously. Thus, the functionalist perspective, which is primarily concerned with explaining society in such a way as to generate useful empirical knowledge, is regulative and pragmatic in its orientation (Morgan, 1980).

The interpretive paradigm, like the functionalist paradigm, identifies a fundamental order and pattern in the social world; however, society has no existence independent from its members (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In other words, the interpretive paradigm is built on the assumption “that what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense, except as the product of the subjective and intersubjective experience of individuals” (Morgan, 1980: 608). Society and its institutions are understood from the perspective of the participant, not from that of the observer. The social world is seen as an

emergent social process created by the individuals concerned. The interpretive perspective is primarily concerned with understanding “the process through which shared multiple realities arise, are sustained, and are changed” (*ibid*).

Radical structuralism is a perspective which emphasizes “the essentially conflictual nature of social affairs and the fundamental process of change which this generates” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 327). According to the paradigm, structural characteristics of society are the result of struggles for power and dominance between competing groups. All societies are the locus of tension and contradiction, and if these become sufficiently acute they will be the cause of radical social changes.

The radical humanist paradigm shares with radical structuralism an emphasis on modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation, and potentiality—known as the sociology of radical change. Although it recognizes structural factors, it does not share the objectivist views of structural tension and contradiction that characterize the radical structuralist paradigm. Radical humanists understand development as the process that frees the human consciousness and promotes the growth of human potentialities. This is because the radical humanist paradigm is characterized by its interest in radical change from a subjectivist perspective. In addition, radical humanists assume that individuals create and sustain the world in which they live, and they take on the task of providing a critique of the world that is created in this manner. “[S]ociety is alienating and [radical humanism] is concerned with ways in which human beings may transcend the psychocultural bonds that tie them to existing social patterns and thus allow them to realize their full potential” (Adams, 1988: 408-409). This perspective is based on “the view that the process of reality creation may be influenced by psychic and social processes which channel, constrain, and control the minds of human beings, in ways which alienate them from the potentialities inherent in their true nature as humans” (Morgan, 1980: 609).

Although Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigms remain a prominent framework used in organizational studies and management (Lewis & Grimes, 1999), there have been growing criticisms about their model. These criticisms are of two kinds.

Firstly, many scholars were critical about over-simplifications in the schema (e.g. Clegg, 1982; Deetz, 1996; Tsoukas, 1994). These critics neither accepted that forcing social theory and organizational theory into a two by two matrix was possible nor considered Burrell and Morgan's attempt as paradigm-free. Clegg (1982) argued that Burrell and Morgan's attempt of forcing complex theories in matrix was typical of functional approaches to the subject matter. Deetz (1996) also criticized that the objective-subjective label reproduced neo-positivist philosophies of science. In particular, these critics were skeptical about the subjective-objective dimension. Willmott (1993a) evaluated the division between subjective and objective approaches as arbitrary and irremediably polarized, so missing out on more nuanced explanations of theory foundations. Deetz (1996) also rejected subjective-objective dimension as outdated and misleading, and argued that this false dichotomy of subjective-objective has resulted in an oversimplified classification of research into irreconcilable binaries, which include the opposition between qualitative versus quantitative research, hypothesis testing versus hypothesis developing, and a practical versus a theoretical focus.

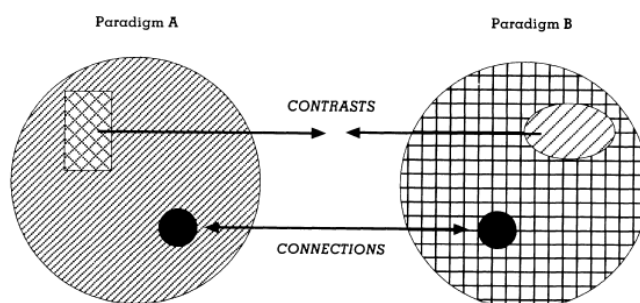
Secondly, scholars criticized the notion of paradigm incommensurability, which refers to the idea that the concepts and methods of one paradigm are not translatable into those used by another paradigm (e. g. Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Hassard, 1988, 1991; Parker & McHugh, 1991; Reed, 1985; Schultz & Hatch, 1996; Willmott, 1993a, b). Schultz and Hatch (1996) accepted four paradigms but were critical about the incommensurability among the paradigms since it hindered full use of diverse theories across paradigms. Gioia and Pitre (1990) recognized theoretical differences among paradigms but suggested that there are blurred zones among boundaries of paradigms, which serve to accommodate different approaches to theory and more comprehensive understanding on multifaceted organizational phenomena.

In contrary to Burrell and Morgan, Kuhn (1962), from whom their paradigm idea originated, took a different approach in relation to the issue of incommensurability and the divergence provided further grounds for the criticism of their framework. Kuhn explained the process of theory development through continuity and stressed the substantial continuity and overlap between paradigms in the mediation of normal and revolutionary moments of scientific

practice. During the transition period, Kuhn (1962: 85) observed, “there will be a large but never complete overlap between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigm”.

In recognition of these criticisms leveled against Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) framework, this thesis adopts a modified use of their approach. Firstly, I will locate literature as a band across paradigms rather than a specific dot in a paradigm to reduce the danger of over-simplification inherent in Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) framework. This indicates this thesis’ stance towards another criticism of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) framework, incommensurability. I follow paradigm-crossing strategies (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Hassard, 1988; Parker & McHugh, 1991; Weaver & Gioia, 1994; Willmott, 1990, 1993a, b) rather than Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigm incommensurability argument and, adopt the interplay strategy which simultaneously recognizes both contrasts and connections between paradigms as a specific strategy (Schultz & Hatch, 1996).

Figure 2.2 Interplay Strategy



Source: Shultz & Hatch (1996: 534)

Theories used in prior studies

There is a lack of work which aims to develop theoretical foundation of employer branding as Edwards (2010) stated in his review of existing literature. This section overviews theories used in prior studies (summarized in Table 2.1) and then suggests relatively less noted but fruitful theories for employer branding studies, which are used as the main theoretical underpinnings of the current thesis.

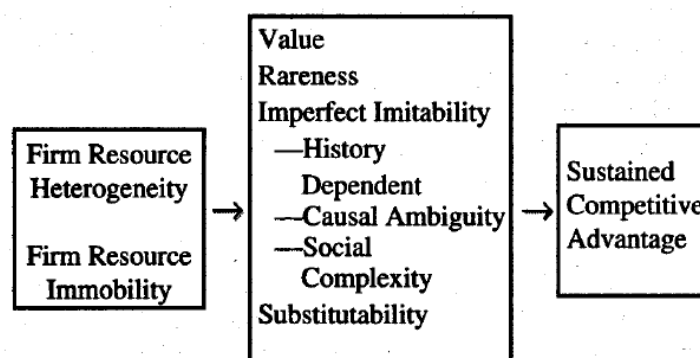
Table 2.1 Theories Used in Employer Branding Literature

Theory	Description	Examples of employer branding studies
RBV	Explaining outperformance of an organization in terms of valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable resources and capabilities	Backhaus & Tikoo (2004)
PC	Explaining employment relationship focusing on employees' sets of expectations on it	Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), Francis & Reddington (2013), Tarnovskaya (2011)
SIT	Explaining people's identity and sense of self in the link with the organizations or work-groups to which they belong	Backhaus & Tikoo (2004), Lievens et al. (2007), Maxwell & Knox (2009)
Signalling theory	Explaining how organizational actions serve as signals reducing information asymmetry	Highhouse et al. (2007, 2009); Martin & Cerdin (2014); Wilden et al. (2010)

Resource based view

The resource based view (RBV), which has become “one of the most influential and cited theories in the history of management theorizing”, aspires to explain the internal sources of a firm's sustainable competitive advantage (Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen, 2010: 350; Lockett, Thompson & Morgenstern, 2009).

Developed as a complement to the industrial organization view of Bain (1968) and Porter (1979, 1980, 1985), the RBV attempts to explain why firms in the same industry might differ in performance through tracing the internal sources of sustained competitive advantage.

Figure 2.3 Framework of RBV

Source: Barney (1991: 112)

Following Penrose (1959) and Wernerfelt (1984), the RBV views a firm as a historically determined bundle of resources and capabilities, which creates

sustainable competitive advantage by being (a) valuable (b) rare (c) inimitable and (d) non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Rare resources are those that are limited in supply and not equally distributed across a firm's current and potential competition. Inimitability refers to the extent to which resources are difficult to replicate by other firms, which may be due to factors such as social complexity (Dierickx & Cool, 1989), specific historical circumstances and causal ambiguity (Barney, 1991). Non-substitutability of resources implies that one resource cannot be simply replaced by another one.

Among three types of resources, i.e. tangible and intangible assets and capabilities, intangible assets have been received the most interest since they were supposed to be harder to imitate, including a firm's management skills, organizational processes, routines, organizational culture (Barney, 1986; Barney, Wright & Ketchen, 2001), organizational identity (Fiol, 1991, 2001), brand and reputation (Oliver, 1997). In this review, the RBV will be primarily reviewed in relation to human resources and reputation management, which have been attracted particular interest as the main intangible assets having critical impacts on firm performance.

The RBV has worked as the theoretical grounding within most of the research that posits that human capital can have a positive impact on firm performance (Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001). Wright et al. (2001) suggested (a) the human capital pool (stock of employee skills) (b) employee relationship and behavior (MacDuffie, 1995) and (c) people management practices (Lado & Wilson, 1994) as a source of sustainable competitive advantage which the RBV mainly concerns. Furthermore, it has been suggested that employees become more valuable when they are interconnected and embedded in socially complex interactions (Coff, 1997).

A review of literature also suggests that reputation³ represents an important

³ In respect to definition of reputation, according to Rindova, Williamson, Petkova and Sever (2005), there are two major perspectives; One is reputation as signal from past actions: And the other is reputation as a collective perceptions of a firm. Specifically, Clark and Montgomery (1998) defined reputation as "an observer's impression of the actor's disposition to behave in a certain manner typically of the actor's past behavior." According to this perspective, past observations signal a firm's true attributes to stakeholders in incomplete information setting (Clark & Montgomery, 1998; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). On the other hand, Fombrun (1996: 72) defined reputation as "a snapshot that reconciles the multiple images of a company held by all its constituencies." These scholars tend to characterize it as a

intangible resource (Hall, 1993) since it is valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable as presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 RBV and Reputation

Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Non-substitutable	Reference
RBV				
A resource must enable a firm to employ a value creating strategy, by either outperforming its competitors or reducing its own weaknesses.	To be of value, a resource must be rare by definition.	If a valuable resource is controlled by only one firm and not duplicable to competitors, it creates a competitive advantage.	Even if a resource is rare, potentially value-creating and imperfectly imitable, an equally important aspect is lack of substitutability	Barney (1986, 1991); Dierickx & Cool (1989); Mahoney & Pandian (1992); Amit & Schoemaker (1993); Peteraf (1993)
Reputation as Organizational Asset				
A favorable reputation is valuable because it brings competitive edge to a firm.	A favorable reputation is rare, because it can be lost more easily than it can be created.	A favorable reputation is inimitable because it takes a long time to be created.	A favorable reputation appeals to all stakeholder groups, representing a non-substitutable asset of a firm.	Fombrun (1996); Dowling (2001); Roberts & Dowling (2002); Davies et al. (2003); Bergh et al. (2010); Boyd et al. (2010); Rindova et al. (2010)

Source: Xu (2011:18) and modified

First, “a reputation is valuable because it informs us about what products to buy, what companies to work for, or what stocks to invest in (...) it calls attention to a company’s attractive features and widens the options available to its managers” (Fombrun, 1996: 5). More concisely, “favorable reputations produce tangible benefits: premium prices for products, lower costs of capital and labor, improved loyalty from employees, greater latitude in decision making, and a cushion of goodwill when crises hit” (Fombrun, 1996: 57). Second, a favorable reputation is a rare resource which is difficult to obtain but easy to lose (Davies,

global impression, which represents how a collective—a stakeholder group or multiple stakeholder groups—perceive a firm (Fombrun, 1996; Hall, 1992; Rao, 1994). According to this perspective, reputation reflects collective perceptions as a result of information exchanges and social influence among various actors interacting in an organizational field (Rao, 1994; Rindova & Fombrun, 1999). In addition, there have been attempts to reconcile these differences through integrative definitions, e.g. past actions and prominence (Rindova et al., 2005) or the awareness and assessment of an actor (Rhee, 2009).

Chun, da Silva & Roper, 2003). Third, good reputation is inimitable because it takes a long time to be created (Dowling, 2001). In particular, when the drivers of reputation are rooted inside a firm, a high degree of causal ambiguity is associated in achieving reputation (Roberts & Dowling, 1997). Lastly, reputation is non-substitutable because it is not something that firms can buy or sell but must cultivate and nurture.

The strength of the RBV was argued to be its ability to explain profitability, diversification strategies and operationalizability of core competence of organizations, in clear-cut managerial and practical terms (Collis & Montgomery, 1995). On the other hand, there have been critiques of the RBV concerning imprecise and all-encompassing resource definitions, its potential tautology, difficulty in operationalizing the concepts involved and limited generalizability of the findings due to the context-specific value of resources (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Newbert, 2007; Priem & Butler, 2001).

In the context of employer branding, aforementioned studies which argued for human capital and reputation as resources provide grounds for the RBV as theoretical foundation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding primarily concerns acquiring and maintaining human capital and elements of reputation, which have been noted as intangible assets for companies (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Dowling, 1994). In this way, employer branding's emphasis of differentiation from its competitors in terms of employment experience is theoretically underpinned by the RBV (Backhaus & Tikko, 2004).

However, Martin et al. (2011) criticized employer branding's high dependence on the RBV, i.e. upon the dimensions of differentiation used in that model, while the approach ignores another main dimension, namely that of legitimacy. In addressing the dimension of legitimacy, institutional theory, which is outlined in the later section, is helpful.

Psychological contract

The psychological contract theory, based on early work from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), provides another theoretical foundation for employer branding (Backhaus & Tickoo, 2004). The development of the psychological contract as concept and theory was invigorated by Rousseau (1989), who defined the psychological contract as “an individual’s beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party” (Rousseau, 1989: 123).

The psychological contract theory appealed as an alternative paradigm to explain employment relationships in an increasingly fragmented workplace through focusing on implicit and unvoiced expectations about employment (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006; Guest, 2004). Conway and Briner (2009) explained the particular relevance of the psychological contract theory to the changing nature of employee-organization relationships based on three aspects: (a) highly intuitive links with employment contracts owing to its typical freight of implicit content (b) usefulness for understanding how macro and micro changes to the employment relationship affect employees’ experience of work and (c) a set of ongoing, dynamic reciprocal processes, where its terms are actively renegotiated, fulfilled or breached on a daily basis by both parties to the contract (Levinson, Price, Munden & Solley, 1962; Schein, 1980).

Specifically, the psychological contract can yield insight in the context of employer branding in terms of three aspects: (a) it can deepen understanding of the employment relationship, by establishing a link with employees’ sets of expectations (Conway & Briner, 2005; Sparrow, 1996) (b) it underlines the importance of realistic job preview and (c) it encourages reconsideration of underlying issues of agency and reciprocity.

Firstly, it is an implicit assumption of the psychological contract, more fundamentally of social exchange theory, that the resources exchanged are valued by the recipient. In other words, the psychological contract assumes that inducements offered by the employer are valued by employees and also employee contributions are valued by the employer.

To establish empirically the typical items that form the contents of the psychological contract, the early research in psychological contracts attempted to categorize the content in various ways. Perhaps the best known of these categorizations is the transactional/relational contents introduced by Rousseau (1989, 1995) (Conway & Briner, 2009). Transactional contracts are associated with economic exchange, in which exchanges are likely to be clearly defined and specific (e.g. pay for performance). Transactional contracts tend to be of short and specific duration, with the focus on pecuniary benefits. Relational contracts are associated with social exchange, in which trust provides the basis for ongoing exchanges between the employee and the organization. Such exchanges engender feelings of mutual obligation, in which employees come to expect that eventually they will be rewarded for their hard work, loyalty, and sacrifice on behalf of the organization (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). Furthermore, efforts have been made to broaden the way in which the contents of the psychological contract are understood. For example, Thompson and Bunderson (2003) suggested ‘ideological currency’ based on Blau’s (1964) ‘ideological reward’.

The categorization of the psychological contract content can be applied as a framework for understanding the complexity of an employment offering in the context of employer branding, e.g. economic transactional content, relational socio-emotional content, and ideological content (Edwards, 2010).

However, in applying the categorization to employer branding literature, recent calls for contextual consideration deserve attention. Conway and Briner (2009: 88) offered the criticism that both logical and empirical evidence for the transactional/relational distinction is limited and argued that “the meaning of any content item is defined by the context of the exchange”. In similar vein, Dick (2006) illustrated the dynamic interplay between employees enacting their psychological contract and social norms regarding HR practices.

Secondly, the psychological contract provides a theoretical background for insisting on realistic job preview as a central issue in the employer branding context. According to Rousseau (2001), the formation of a psychological contract may start with recruitment messages being distributed through employer branding activities. Thus, it is of crucial importance that the employer brand messages provide an accurate picture of the firm’s employment benefits. If this

is the case, employer branding might help to create accurate perceptions of the organization for potential recruits (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). If the communicated benefits cannot be fulfilled by the company, employees may develop perceptions of violation or breach of the psychological contract, which means that employees believe that the organization reneged on its obligations (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Research has shown that violation of the psychological contract correlates positively with turnover, intentions to quit, reduced job satisfaction and organizational trust, as well as decreased job performance (*ibid*). Therefore, employer branding should contribute to the creation of a realistic job preview by providing negative as well as positive information about the employment opportunity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Moroko and Uncles (2008) identify the fulfillment of a psychological contract as one of the most important characteristics of successful employer brands.

Finally, more fundamentally, assumptions underlying the psychological contract are relevant in the context of employer branding. Specifically, these are assumptions (a) about who is agent in the contract and (b) about the norm of reciprocity (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007)

On the one hand, regarding the specification of agent, referring to who is “capable of exerting some degree of control over social relations in which one is enmeshed, while in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree” (Sewell, 1992:20), the employee’s line manager or HR manager who sends out messages regarding expectations and obligations has been cited as an important agent for the organization (Marks, 2001). HR practices also play an important role in signaling and creating particular employment offerings and images of employee-organization relationships (Martin et al., 2011). Importantly, employees tend to personify the organization by attributing their organization with human-like qualities, which is also referred as the process of anthropomorphization (Levinson et al., 1962). For example, Francis and Reddington (2012) showed how managers attributed to the organization human-like qualities and how actions by trainers and coaches are treated as actions by the organization itself. However, the criticism has been offered that personification involves a risk of oversimplification of the reality of employment life, particularly when cultural values have been ignored (Watson, 2002). For example, without consideration of paternalism, which describes people in

authority assuming the role of parents and the associated obligation to support and protect others in their care (Redding, Norman, & Schlender, 1994), an individual's schemata about their relationship with the organization may not be able to properly understood (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007).

On the other hand, Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity, the notion that people will return benefits given to them in a relationship as a payback for those benefits received (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), works as underlying assumption of employer branding as well as the psychological contract. Reciprocity explains how organizations benefit from having employee-friendly policies. Employees acknowledge the support they receive from the organization, feeling that they owe something to it in return, and they react to this favourable treatment by demonstrating stronger commitment (Gouldner, 1960).

Gouldner (1960) speculated that a norm of reciprocity is a universal principle, and this view is shared by others (e.g. Tsui & Wang, 2002; Wang, Tsui, Zhang & Ma, 2003). However, some argued that even if reciprocity is a human universal, there are cultural and individual differences (e.g. Parker, 1998; Rousseau & Schalk, 2000; Shore & Coyle-Shapiro, 2003).

Furthermore, Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen and Tetrick, (2009) argued that a broader view ought to be taken of the norm of reciprocity. They differentiated a content model of exchange, which focuses on the quantity and types of the resources exchanged, and a process model of exchange, which is centred on the quality of the exchange. The process model of social exchange suggests the meaning attached to these components appears to be of more importance than the content or make-up of the deal. Wong, Blazey, Sullivan, Zheltoukhova, Albert and Reid (2010) also illustrated the perceived value of working within an organization was more strongly linked with brand values and ideologies than with the more functional economic and social aspects of the deal typically expressed in psychological contract research.

Social identity theory

As discussed in relation to definitions of employer branding, employer branding has been conceptualized from an organizational study perspective, which concerns the character of the firm itself (Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Martin & Beaumont, 2003) as well as the dominant marketing perspective, which

approaches it as a package of benefits to employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Organizational identity, generally defined as what is most central, enduring and distinctive about an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985), is thus a core element of the alternative approach to employer branding from organizational study perspective (Edwards, 2010).

Organizational identity concerns the question of “who are we, as an organization?” (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The notion that the organization has a fixed answer for the question and employees are attracted more or less by the contents of the answer provides the link between organizational identity and employer branding (Edwards, 2010). In the process, organizational identification is involved, which refers to “the degree of cognitive connection that a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization” (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994: 239). Fundamentally, social identity theory (SIT) which posits that people derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organizations or work-groups to which they belong supports the idea of affinities that exist among organizational identity, organizational identification and employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Tajfel, 1982). Organizational identification has long been recognized as a critical construct in the literature on organizational behavior, affecting both the satisfaction of the individual and the effectiveness of the organization (Brown, 1969; Hall, Schneider & Nygren, 1970; Lee, 1971; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Patchen, 1970; Rotondi, 1975). Hence, it is argued that one of the primary aims of employer branding is to encourage existing employees to identify with the organization (Edwards, 2005, 2010; Martin, 2008). In the remaining part of this section, organizational identity and organizational identification literature based on SIT is reviewed, focusing on their relevance to employer branding.

In respect to organizational identity, there are various classifications: shared perceptions among members versus institutionalized claims of an organization as a ‘social actor’ (Whetten & Mackey, 2002), a macro versus micro level phenomenon (Brickson, 2000), a core essence versus social construction (Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol & Hatch, 2006) or a functional/interpretative/postmodern perspective (Gioia, 1998).

Among the classifications, the social actor conception of organizational identity, which is basically evolved from the view on organizational identity as a core essence, is the most prominent (Corley et al., 2006). The perspective treats organizational identity as a self-referential organizational property. In other words, the social actor view treats organizational identity “as a set of institutional claims that explicitly articulates who the organization is and what it represents” (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010: 5).

Alternatively, social constructionists view organizational identity as emergent and as a “dynamic set of processes by which an organization’s self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organization offered by all organizational stakeholders who join in the dance” (Hatch & Schultz, 2002: 1004; Weick, 1995). To them, it can be a social product rather than a possession of organizations.

In line with the social constructionist perspective, Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000: 76) suggested organizational identity as “a negotiated, interactive, reflexive concept” that answers the question: “who we are becoming as an organization?” The negotiated content emerging from such a process can be seen to represent what is taken to be appropriate, natural and valued in the organization (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001). Thus, whereas the functionalist view conceptualizes organizational identity as afixed, enduring, and permanent uniqueness, Gioia (1998) suggested that organizational identity be regarded primarily as malleable. It may retain specific core beliefs and values, but shifts in the interpretation and meaning over time (Gioia et al., 2000).

In regard to explanatory capability of SIT in terms of societal aspect, there has been criticism. As considered above, social connections are inherent in SIT (Scott & Lane, 2000). Despite this, as Rao, Davis and Ward (2000) pointed out, SIT has flourished in relative isolation from the notion of embeddedness, which refers to “the nesting of firm and market behavior in a social and normative context” (Oliver, 1996: 167). Arguing that SIT and the embeddedness idea are potentially capable of mutual enrichment, Rao and colleagues illustrated their point by showing how defections from NASDAQ to the NYSE could be seen as influenced by the organizations’ need to maintain positive social identity.

It has been argued that employees tend to identify with their organization more when the organization has an attractive identity, since this contributes to their self-esteem (Dutton et al., 1994). Employees may identify with the values and characteristics associated with a strong organizational identity which provides meaning to their work. This means that organizational identity which describes values and characteristics of the organization guides employees by exerting prescriptive influence on their attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Haslam, Van Knippenberg, Platow & Ellemers, 2003). In turn, employees' enactment of the values of the organization helps to ensure and reinforce the organization's identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1996).

Value congruence between individuals and organization, which has also been discussed under the label of 'person-organization fit' (e.g. Kristof, 1996), often determines an organization's attractiveness and can be an important part of the employee's identification with the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Judge & Cable, 1997).

Research has shown that value congruence is of high importance for current employees of an organization. Employees who feel a connection with their employer through sharing the same values show a greater degree of identification with the company and seem to perform better (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Employees seem to remain longer within the same company if they feel that their values are supported by their employer. This can be explained on the basis that employees try to keep their self-image consistent and wish to act according to this self-image. Thus, they will only leave their employer if they perceive relatively strong differences between their expectations and the company's value system (Dutton et al., 1994).

Similar evidence has been found in respect to prospective employees. Applicants are attracted to an employer more when their own personalities, needs and values match those of the company (Judge & Cable, 1997; Schneider, 1987; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow & Si, 2001). New employees with a matching value system seem to fit in more quickly with their employer and manage to get along better (Carless, 2005).

Lievens and coauthors (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Van Hove & Anseel, 2007) integrated strands of organizational identity and employer branding by

analyzing the former with an instrumental-symbolic framework derived from the latter.

The instrumental dimension of organizational identity concerns the *instrumental* needs of people for objective, physical and tangible attributes of an organization, e.g. the ability to provide rewarding jobs, high salaries, opportunities for career advancement, job security and job satisfaction.

The symbolic dimension of organizational identity concerns subjective, abstract and intangible needs of people for meaning, e.g. employees' feelings of pride in the organization, the extent to which it gives them a sense of purpose, beliefs about its technical competence and honesty in dealing with clients and employees, the extent to which it is an exciting or innovative place to work, and the extent to which it is seen as chic, stylish and/or as aggressively masculine or competitive (Davies & Chun, 2003).

In discussing organizational identity, a distinction is often made between two types, i.e. perceived organizational identity (organizational members' perception of what their organization stands for) and construed external image (organizational members' assessment of how outsiders see the organization). Both have been found to be strongly related to employees' organizational identification (Dukerich, Golden & Shortell, 2002; Riordan, Gatewood & Bill, 1997). Dutton et al. (1994) noted that construed external image may not be identical to outsiders' actual assessment of the organization (corporate reputation), yet empirical support of this proposition is limited (Lievens et al., 2007). This gap in the literature is significant since it has been argued the importance of consonance among corporate identity, external perceptions of organizational identity and employees' construed identity (e.g. Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Cornelissen, Christensen & Kinuthia, 2007).

Signalling theory

Signalling theory, introduced in the information economics research of Spence (1973, 1974) on job market signalling, is concerned with the reduction of information asymmetry between two parties. The signal construct refers to activities or attributes that deliberately or inadvertently convey information to other individuals in the market (Spence, 1974, 2002).

Like other social sciences, management studies have used signalling theory to explain how individuals or organizations provide or obtain information of unobservable quality (Cronk, 1995; Spence, 2002), in various areas including entrepreneurship (Busenitz, Fiet & Moesel, 2005; Certo, 2003; Lester, Certo, Dalton, Dalton & Canella, 2006), strategic management (Zhang & Wiersema, 2009) and HRM (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams & Ganapathi, 2007; Luce, Barber & Hillman, 2001; Suazo, Martinez & Sandoval, 2009, 2011).

Signallers in management studies include individuals as well as firm-level ones. For example, the entrepreneurship literature generally deals with these leaders as signallers (Bruton, Chahine & Filatotchev, 2009; Zimmerman, 2008). HRM studies, as Connelly, Certo, Ireland and Reutzel (2011) suggested, also usually concern signals emanating from individuals, including recruiters (Ehrhart & Zeigert, 2005; Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991), managers (Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz & Wiethoff, 2010), or employees (Hochwater, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell & James, 2007). Nevertheless, firm-level signallers have also been explored in some HRM studies, in order to understand how observable organizational characteristics are used in assessing invisible qualities, e.g. organizational culture (Ryan, Sacco, McFarland & Kriska, 2000) and reputation (Highhouse, Thornbury & Little, 2007; Highhouse, Brooks & Gregarus, 2009).

In the context of employer branding, signalling theory provides a useful basis for understanding the informational aspects of employment relationship (Connelly et al., 2011). As Dogl and Holtbrugge (2014) noted, signalling has formed a substantial element of employer branding as “a firm’s effort to *promote*, both within and outside the firm, *a clear view* of what makes it different and desirable as an employer” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004: 501, italics added).

Whereas the signalling theory literature in HRM generally deals with the recruitment process, existing employees also rely on signals associated with their employer’s HR practices to understand its intentions and actions, due to their incomplete information about their employer (Suazo et al., 2009).

According to signalling theory, individuals facing difficult decisions about quality attend to particular kinds of informational cues, which are difficult to fake (Durcikova & Gray, 2009). Concepts of ‘signal cost’ and ‘signal honesty’ are centrally involved here. Signal cost refers to the level of expense associated with the signal. If a signaller who does not have the relevant quality associated with the signal, thinks that the benefits of signalling exceeds the signal cost, the signaller can be prompted to try false signalling. Signal honesty, defined as “the extent to which the signaller actually has the underlying quality associated with the signal” (Connelly et al., 2011: 46; Durcikova & Gray, 2009), applies in the employer branding context particularly to the symbolic and cultural cues that employees may expect to find from good employers (Martin & Groen-in’t-Woud, 2011). These cues include “deeply held cultural values, assumptions and beliefs, and the meaning that they can expect to derive from working in an organization” (Davies, 2008 cited in Martin & Groen-in’t-Woud, 2011: 88).

Although signalling theory generally concerns insiders’ intentional actions with explicit aims to deliver positive and imperceptible qualities of the insider (Connelly et al., 2011), some studies have dealt with unintentional (Daily, Certo & Dalton, 2005; Janney & Folta, 2003) and negative signals as well (Perkins & Henry, 2005). As Martin and Groen-in’t-Woud (2011) have argued, drawing upon existing studies in the reputation and employer branding literature (Dowling, 2001; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Miles & Mangold, 2004), one of the most powerful sources of signals about the employer brand are often employees. That is, employees’ ‘raw’ evaluation on the ‘reality’ of working in the organization, and their views of the honesty of the signals produced by their organization, is generally more influential than intended official signals from the management (Dowling, 2001; Highhouse et al., 2009).

Theoretical underpinnings of the current thesis

Institutional theory

Institutional theory⁴ has had enormous importance in directing researchers to examine social influence in shaping organizations' actions. Institutional theorists argued that organizations must consider not only their technical environment but also their institutional environment which is the "regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive features that define 'social fitness'" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Scott, 2004: 7). Therefore, institutional theory represents a break with the previously dominant behavioral approaches to organizations as rational actors that are mainly driven by efficiency (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

In reviewing institutional theory, I present an overview of the theory by comparing 'old' and 'new' institutional theories, then focus on main issues in the theory, i.e. legitimacy, embeddedness/agency and institutional logic. Finally, arguments for the integration of institutional theory and the RBV are reviewed.

'Old' & 'New' institutional theories

Institutional theory has its root in Selznick's (1948, 1949, 1957) work, in which he argued that organizations pursue both formal (bureaucratic) and informal (adaptive) relationships. He argued that institutions should be understood in their broader socio-cultural contexts since they are "inescapably imbedded in an institutional matrix" (Selznick, 1948: 25). Earlier institutional theorists stressed the regulative and normative aspects of institutional systems. Organizations are institutionalized when formal practices and structures are "infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" (Selznick, 1957:17). The key forms of cognition are values, norms, and attitudes and institutionalization of organizations occur within a "moral frame of reference" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 15). Classical or old institutional theorists are primarily interested in what goes on within organizations since they view organizations as organic entities which are institutionalized through their interactions with local environments.

⁴Institutional theory and institutionalism are used interchangeably in the current thesis. New institutional theory, new institutionalism and neo-institutionalism are also used interchangeably.

In the 1970s, ‘new’ institutional theory which focuses on the role of cognition and culture rather than moral values emerged. New institutional theory emphasizes a cognitive and cultural approach, thus it views institutions as macro-level abstractions made of taken-for-granted scripts, rules, and classifications (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). New institutionalists are more interested in the effect of nonlocal environments such as whole industries, professions, or societies (Scott & Meyer, 1991). In particular, organizational fields, which are “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life” has become a focal level of analysis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 148). Institutionalization occurs at societal levels, with organizational forms, structural components and rules as the unit of analysis, rather than at specific organization levels. Thus, organizations are viewed as “loosely coupled arrays of standardized elements” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991: 14) in new institutional theory.

Legitimacy

Within new institutional theory, legitimacy is central for understanding why some organizations are better in gaining stability, acquiring needed resources and enhancing their survival prospects. Legitimacy refers to a generalized perception “that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574). Organizations imitate other organizations in an effort to secure legitimacy, without necessarily making them more efficient.

The process of homogenization is explained through the notion of isomorphism, the extent to which organizations adopt the same structures and processes as other organizations within their environment (Zucker, 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) specified three isomorphic processes as coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism involves “explicit regulatory processes—rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities” (Scott, 1994: 52). Normative isomorphism involves values and norms that “introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life” (Scott, 1994: 54). Mimetic

isomorphism stems from “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made” (Scott, 1994: 57).

In regard to legitimacy, Weber (1947, 1968) has been credited as the pioneer who introduced legitimacy as a theme into social science. Weber (1947) defined authority as the probability that a person with the legitimate right to command will be granted obedience. He formulated three sources of legitimacy: traditional (based upon the idea that what has always been will remain), charismatic (which is based on an individual’s capacity and personality) and legal-rational (which recognizes the rational and legal authority of the ruler to govern over a subject population). Also Weber suggested that legitimacy can result from conformity with both general social norms and formal laws by discussing the importance of social practice being oriented to ‘maxims’ or rules.

In general, there are two approaches to legitimacy, the strategic perspective and the institutional perspective. The strategic view of legitimacy is an agent-centered approach to legitimacy (Wilcox, 2007) since the focus rests on the organization and assumes a relatively high degree of managerial control over the legitimating process (e.g. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Perrow, 1961; Pfeffer, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Richardson, 1985). In the institutionalist tradition, in contrast, focus is placed on how organizations or groups of organizations adapt to their institutional environments in order to manage legitimacy. Thus, legitimacy is not seen as an operational resource, but rather as a set of external constraints, forming the actions of the organization (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995; Zucker, 1987).

A number of subtypes of legitimacy can be identified. A distinction can be made between pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). While the first type is grounded in the self-interest of the organization’s stakeholders, aiming for influence or a tangible return in exchange for granting legitimacy, moral legitimacy is based on a conscious judgement of the audience whether the actions of the organization are granted moral approval or not. In contrast to pragmatic legitimacy, the decision of moral legitimacy is not merely based on self-interest calculations. The third type,

cognitive legitimacy, is fundamentally different from the former two in that it is not the result of a communicative discourse between the organization and its stakeholders (e.g. Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Scott, 1995). Instead, it is based on cognition, either because the organization itself or its actions are comprehensible or are taken for granted (e.g. Suchman, 1995).

The strategic approach, on the one hand, is excessively focused on pragmatic legitimacy, with an assumption that organizations have the power to strategically affect their societal context, thus manipulating the ascription of legitimacy. The institutional approach, on the other hand, uses cognitive legitimacy as its primary point of reference (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006).

Embeddedness/agency

As indicated, institutional theory has basically explained the nature of the firm in terms of a socio-institutional framework of rules, routines, conventions, and normative pressures (Deephouse, 1996; Scott, 1987; Oliver, 1996). Therefore, the notion of embeddedness is fundamental in institutional theory. However, there was difference in approach to embeddedness between old and new institutional theory. The former concentrated upon intra-organizational dynamics, and understood the position of organizations as paradoxical between “formal structures subject to calculable manipulation” and social structures “inescapably imbedded in an institutional matrix” (Selznick, 1948: 25-26). By contrast, the latter, the early neo-institutionalists (e.g. Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1983; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1983) in particular, tended to overemphasize the constraints of macro-level environments on organizations. They often took for granted that organizations and individuals passively conform to institutions. In this respect, it has been argued that old institutional theory’s focus on agency, referring to “an actor’s ability to have some effect on the social world—altering the rules, relational ties, or distribution of resources” (Scott, 2008: 77), has been substituted by new institutional theory’s emphasis of structural embeddedness, which is often criticized as oversocialization (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997).

Responding to the criticism, institutional theorists have begun to tackle the issue of change and the question of organizational and human agency has become important to them. Since the 1990s, new institutionalists have focused more on the ways in which both individuals and organizations innovate, act strategically, and contribute to institutional change (e.g. Barley & Tolbert, 1997; DiMaggio, 1988; Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Karnoe, 1997; Kondra & Hinings, 1998; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay & King, 1991).

In an effort to emancipate itself from the over-deterministic views of the early new institutional theory, the notion of ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ (DiMaggio, 1988) was developed. Introducing the term institutional entrepreneur, DiMaggio (1988: 14, italics in original) proposed that changes in organizational fields “arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (*institutional entrepreneurs*) see in them an opportunity to realize an interest that they value highly.” It was explained that institutional entrepreneurs can resist pressures of institutionalization because of their structural position within a field or their unique social skill or power (e.g. Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

The notion of institutional entrepreneurs, however, has drawn substantial criticism: the simplistic use of agency as an explanatory variable of changes undermines the validity of the institutional theory and the paradox of embedded agency, i.e. “how can actors change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institution they wish to change?”, has not been resolved (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009; Holm, 1995: 398; Seo & Creed, 2002). Instead of using ‘heroes’ (Delmestri, 2006) or ‘hyper muscular agents’ (Suddaby, 2010) to explain change, critics argued for endogenous explanations of institutional change, i.e. explanations that de-focalize the role of highly agentic actors.

In the following section, a concept of institutional logics, which tried to overcome the deterministic tendency of institutional theory and address institutional dynamics, is considered.

Institutional logic

Institutional logics were suggested by Friedland and Alford (1991) with a goal to “bring the content of societal institutions into individuals’ and organizations’ behavior” (Thornton, 2009: 23). Critical of confined unit of analysis of most neo-institutionalism (i.e. institutional fields), Friedland and Alford (1991: 240) extended it to the societal level, which they conceived as “a potentially contradictory interinstitutional system.” Friedland and Alford argued that the over-emphasis of congruence at the macro-level hampers consideration of specific institutional contents and the conditions under which particular institutionalization occurs. Thus, instead of focusing on isomorphism, they were interested in restoring meaning into social analysis in a nonfunctionalist way.

For this, Friedland and Alford (1991: 243) argued for reconceptualizing institutions as a “simultaneously material and ideal” concept and introduced the concept of institutional logics as the organizing principles for society. Following Friedland and Alford, institutional logics were defined as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions that constitute organizing principles for broader suprarational orders” (Lok, 2010: 1307). Therefore, the institutional logics perspective primarily concerns “the effects of differentiated institutional logics on individuals and organizations in a larger variety of contexts” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008: 100).

While Friedland and Alford brought society back into institutional analysis, Thornton et al. (2012) strengthened its micro-foundation according to Friedland and coauthors’ (2014) acknowledgement. Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argued that, by defining the content and meaning of institutions, which has remained as “a black box” (Zucker, 1991: 105), the Institutional logics perspective opened the way to address the absence of microfoundations of neo-institutionalism, thus bringing structure and agency together.

Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999) account of change in the publishing industry, which describes the transition from an editorial logic to a market logic has been evaluated as the landmark application of institutional logics in organization studies (Klein, 2013). After their work others followed suit, and related studies

have ranged from the study of colleges and universities (Gumport, 2000), to the analysis of mutual funds and accounting firms (Lounsbury, 2002, 2007; Thornton, Jones & Kury, 2005) to the interpretation of change in the French gastronomy (Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003) and the list continues to grow (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Despite efforts to strengthen the micro-foundation of institutional theory, there have been some criticisms that institutional logics perspective has yet fully provided “the ways institutional logics are worked out on the ground, in day-to-day behaviors and experiences of actors” (Zilber, 2013: 82). These arguments were offered on the basis of three grounds: (a) the unmitigated predominance of field-level approach (b) the black box approach (, which Thornton and Ocasio (2008) indicated as a contribution of institutional logics perspective above) and (c) the primacy of the material over the symbolic in institutional logics studies. Firstly, the dominance of organizational fields as level of analysis in institutional studies has persisted in institutional logics research (Greenwood, Hinings & Whetten, 2014).

The second criticism is concerned with the positivistic or post-positivistic paradigm, which primarily seeks for causal connections, has been dominant in institutional studies, and institutional logics research is not exception (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011; Bort & Kieser, 2011). Thus, complex social dynamics tend to be reduced to causal relationships while their nuanced textures are not fully explored (Zilber, 2013).

The final critique is in line with the appraisal by Friedland (2012), the main proponent of institutional logics perspective, of his followers. Friedland pointed out that Thornton et al. (2012) have omitted the core of his own argument of institutional logics, i.e. values, which he re-termed as substance to highlight its constitutive role. Klein (2013) also explained the divergence between Friedland and Alford’s and later works in terms of different understanding of the relationship between values and practices; whereas the original proposal took an intrinsic and constitutive approach, in which practices are inseparable from the substance, followers took an extrinsic and modular approach, in which an institutional logic’s components are decomposable and operationalizable.

Integration of institutional theory and the RBV

As the last point to review in regard to institutional theory, it is worth looking at the integration of the RBV and institutional theory.

There is a tension between the RBV and institutional theory; The RBV focuses on explanations of firm heterogeneity in order to be able to account for differences in performance, whereas new institutionalism aims at explaining isomorphism. Another difference between the two approaches is linked to rationality assumptions about individual and firm behavior. The RBV builds on the economic rationality assumption of human behaviour (utility maximisation), while neo-institutionalism emphasises the normative rationality (or non-rationality) in organizational behaviors. According to institutional theory, individuals are motivated to conform to social pressures whereas the RBV posits that individuals are motivated to maximize available economic choices. Institutional theory suggests that firms make normatively controlled choices that are formed by the social environments surrounding the firm, whereas the RBV suggests that firms make economically rational choices that are formed by the economic environments surrounding the firm. Institutional theory also suggests that social pressures reduce variation in firms' structures and strategies, whereas the RBV suggests that market imperfections increase variation in firms' resources and resource strategies (Oliver, 1997). From the RBV, imperfect and incomplete factor markets are the source of resource mobility barriers that give rise to firm heterogeneity. From an institutional perspective, social and economic interrelations among firms and common dependencies on a range of external actors are sources of pressures for isomorphism or conformity that give rise to firm homogeneity (*ibid*).

Nonetheless, prior literature suggested that the RBV and institutional perspectives can co-exist (*ibid*). Rao (1994: 41) posited the tension between the RBV and institutional theory as not “the outcome of incommensurable paradigms” but as “reflection of the juxtaposition of agency and structure.” Some researchers maintained that institutional theory can explain not only conformity and isomorphism in organizations, but also differentiation and heterogeneity (Oliver, 1991; Fernandez-Alles & Valle-Cabrera, 2006). Fernandez-Alles and Valle-Cabrera (2006) suggested that the paradox of conformity versus differentiation,

which is epitomized in a key question of ‘how can organizations that face institutional pressures and accept their stakeholders’ claims create and sustain competitive advantages?’ is resolved as following: Conformity reduces differentiation but, at the same time, reduces risks associated with the loss of legitimacy and helps in resource acquisition.

Sensemaking theory

Sensemaking has established itself as a distinct topic of study since Garfinkel (1967) and Weick (1969), although the origin of sensemaking in the organizational literature can be traced back to James (1890) and Dewey (1922) (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In Weick’s (1969) book, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, he explained sensemaking as recursive cycles of enactment, selection, and retention, through which organizational actors meant to reduce equivocality such as might result from, e.g. rapidly developing changes in the environment (Weick had studied and drawn lessons from the Mann Gulch Fire Disaster of 1949).

Some scholars refer to ‘sensemaking theory’ (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013; Jensen, Kjaergaard & Svejvig, 2009; Stein, 2004), ‘sensemaking perspective’, (Drazin, Glynn & Kazanjian, 1999; Schultz & Hernes, 2013; Weick, 1995) or ‘sensemaking lens’ (Sonenshein, 2009; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Vough, 2012).

Historical overview

As Maitlis and Christianson (2014) have remarked, various groundworks for sensemaking research were laid in the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, social constructionism, which challenged established notions of an objective reality and argued for the social construction of reality, achieved currency (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

By the 1980s, the cognitive underpinnings of sensemaking research have attracted the interest of sensemaking scholars (Daft & Weick, 1984; Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Louis, 1980). This is a reflection of the cognitive turn in organizational behavior studies (Walsh, 1995).

In the 1990s, sensemaking research was enriched as various areas of sensemaking study were developed. Most importantly, in a seminal book, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Weick (1995) developed a theoretical framework for understanding core aspects of sensemaking. In studies in the context of conventional environments, attempts were made to link sensemaking to organizational outcomes, for example culture (Drazin et al., 1999), strategic change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Thomas, Clark & Gioia, 1993) and social influence (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993). Critical events provided effective contexts in which to deepen understanding of how people accomplish sensemaking in the midst of crises (Weick, 1990, 1993) or how people use sensemaking in the aftermath of crises (Gephart, 1993; Gephart, Steier & Lawrence, 1990). Language was included as one of the sensemaking research topics as it came to be seen as a building block of sensemaking (Boyce, 1995; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995).

Since 2000's, the scope of sensemaking research has continued to expand. For example, Maitlis (2005) paid explicit attention to social processes as a mechanism of sensemaking. Weber and Glynn (2006) attempted to bridge levels of analysis using the sensemaking concept. The literature examining the relationship between sensemaking and language has continued to grow as sensemaking has been linked with narrative (Dunford & Jones, 2000) and discursive practices (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

Sensemaking as a cognitive process vs. Sensemaking as a social process

There are, as Maitlis and Christianson (2014) suggested, two distinct ontological assumptions underpinning sensemaking: a view that understands sensemaking as a cognitive process taking place within individuals and the other view that looks sensemaking as a social process occurring between people.

On the one hand, some sensemaking studies approach sensemaking as cognitive process, yielding such cognitive results as frameworks or schemata. For example, Hill and Levenhagen (1995: 1057) approached sensemaking as “a mental model of how the environment works” developed by entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, sensemaking has been understood as a social process where meaning is challenged, negotiated and mutually constructed. It has been

described as the “discursive processes of constructing and interpreting the social world” (Gephart, 1993: 1485). Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005: 409) emphasized that sensemaking unfolds “in a social context of other actors”. Maitlis (2005: 21) also described sensemaking as “a fundamentally social process” in which “organization members interpret their environment in and through interactions with each other, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively”.

Triggers of sensemaking

Sensemaking occurs in a variety of organizational contexts where violated expectations cause surprise or confusion. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) have categorized these triggers of sensemaking in terms of (a) environmental jolts (Meyer, 1982), (b) organizational crises (Brown & Jones, 2000; Weick, 1988, 1993) and threats to organizational identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), and (c) planned organizational change initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Firstly, sensemaking can happen as a response to an environmental jolt, i.e. a sudden and unforeseeable event. In Meyer (1982)’s study, a doctors’ strike functioned as a trigger of sensemaking. Presenting diverse and anomalous adaptations to this environmental jolt as a process of sensemaking, Meyer identified abrupt changes in environments as an opportunity for organizational learning and as a springboard for unrelated changes.

Secondly, identity threat works as a powerful trigger of sensemaking. Sensemaking, Weick (1995: 23) argued, is prompted by “a failure to confirm one’s self”. For example, Maitlis’ (2009) study on professional musicians suffering from injury, and Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann’ (2006) research on medical residents experiencing discrepancy between their newly acquired identity as physicians and their daily routines of menial tasks, dealt with such triggers.

Research on organizational identity threats has taken various forms. Events which create a discrepancy between the external construed image and organization’s identity have been illustrated as triggers of sensemaking. In a

study of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Dutton and Dukerich (1991) showed how an organizational identity crisis, caused by these organizations' untraditional treatment of homeless persons, triggered organizational members' sensemaking. Elsbach and Kramer (1996) investigated how members of business schools responded to an organizational identity threat caused by disappointing results in the Business Week survey rankings of U.S. business schools. In the study, members made efforts to sustain positive organizational identity by focusing on particular organizational categories which the rankings had overlooked.

Finally, as well as these unforeseen events including environmental jolts, organizational crises, and threats to identity, anticipated and scheduled events can also trigger sensemaking. Some sensemaking research has explored organizational members' response to delivery by the chief executive officer (CEO) of a new vision in response to environmental changes (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) or to the arrival of a new CEO with a new vision for the organization that challenged existing organizational identity (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark & Chittipeddi, 1994).

However, criticism has been raised that the sensemaking literature has mostly confined its attention to specific episodes and overlooked larger contexts (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014), which is relevant in the context of issues raised in the following section.

Sensemaking and institutional theory

It has been pointed out that the societal influence on sensemaking has not received due attention (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). In the sensemaking literature, the economic and political contexts that affect organizations' and individuals' thought processes, behavior and interaction with others have been undervalued (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Only a limited number studies have examined the mutually constitutive relationship between field-level discourses and sensemaking (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). Thus, as Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 98) acknowledged in their review, sensemaking could be regarded as "unfolding in

an improbably hyper-agentive environment”, particularly from a critical management perspective.

Although, sensemaking has been conceptualized in terms of discursive practices (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), as discussed above, and prominent authors (e.g. Weick et al., 2005) have proposed to connect the study of sensemaking with the field of institutions, sensemaking has rarely been considered in the rapidly growing area of discourse and institutions (Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004 cited in Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

The dearth of study linking sensemaking and institutional theory can be partly explained in terms of a tendency to assume that their interconnection can be taken as read. That is, institutions are generally understood to provide a constraint on sensemaking (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Zucker, 1991), and on the other hand institutions have been understood as an outcome of collective sensemaking (Danneels, 2003; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009).

In contrast to this assumed interdependence, few scholars have made any explicit effort to co-develop these two areas (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Weber and Glynn (2006) identified priming, editing, and triggering as three primary mechanisms whereby institutional context affects sensemaking. In an in-depth analysis of the aftermath of the dot-com crash, Zilber (2007) analyzed the role and usage of stories as devices of and resources for institutional entrepreneurship. Specifically, actors who represented different groups in the field engaged in constructing stories, sometimes a shared story of the crisis that reflected the institutional order and sometimes a counter-story of indictment, blaming other groups for the crisis and calling for changes in the institutional order. Thereby, these actors played a powerful part in justifying, framing and legitimating a renewed institutional order. Schultz and Wehmeier (2010) examined how CSR was institutionalized within corporate communications; this study emphasizes that the interpretive acts inherent in institutionalization are more like processes of translation than processes of diffusion.

Summary of groundwork review

Up to this point, this section has reviewed definitions of employer branding, Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms and theories underpinning employer branding. Suggestions of theoretical development on employer branding are outlined when a research framework is suggested in the last section of the current chapter.

Based on Burrell and Morgan's paradigms, I attempt to classify employer branding research into philosophical frameworks. For this work, I need to go back to four sets of underlying assumptions Burrell and Morgan applied in drawing four paradigms. Those assumptions are modified reflecting the context of employer branding as follows:

- (a) Ontological presumption of employer branding: Whether the employer branding is seen as an objective entity external to the individuals or as a construction of the individuals.
- (b) Epistemological purpose of employer branding research: Whether the employer branding research aims to obtain knowledge on employer branding in general or understand in the context of one organization.
- (c) Nature of employee (Roles given to employees in employer branding): The individual involved in employer branding is perceived as determined by management or having a free reflective will.
- (d) Methodology (Societal influence on employer branding): Whether employer branding is studied under the consideration of societal context or not.

Ontological presumption of employer branding, the first set of assumption, concerns the very essence and nature of focal phenomena, i.e. whether employer branding is an entity given 'out there' or the product of individual cognition. In the context of employer branding research, objectivism understands employer branding as given and static, and subjectivism understands it as processual in nature.

The second assumption, epistemological purpose of employer branding research is associated with the ontological stance. The sort of research which approaches employer branding as an outcome separated from individuals aims to acquire knowledge which is "hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible

form” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 1). In contrast, the ontological stance acknowledging the essentially unique and personal nature of employer branding seeks to obtain softer and more subjective knowledge.

The third assumption, nature of employee, is primarily about the relationship between human beings and their environment, i.e. whether human beings are viewed as responding to their environment in a mechanistic way or as behaving voluntarily. In the current thesis, having regard to the context of employer branding studies, it has been recast and specified as the relationship between employees and management; thus focus is placed specifically on the employee’s role in employer branding.

As Burrell and Morgan (1979) noted, the three assumptions above are closely associated with the last assumption, methodology. Extending their original focus, which concerned the question whether the method used is nomothetic, oriented towards ‘scientific’ rigor, or ideographic, emphasizing ‘getting inside’ situations, this thesis approaches methodology in terms of an “analytic-reductionist-mechanistic-behavioral-quantitative” vs. a “synthetic-holistic-ideographic-contextual” one (Kim, 1988: 17). In particular, this review pays attention to the acontextual vs. contextual nature (Johns, 2001) of employer branding literature.

Here, according to the modified underlying assumptions, philosophical frameworks of employer branding research are exhibited, i.e. (a) employer branding as management practices (b) employer branding as sensemaking (c) employer branding as critical discourse and (d) employer branding as structural labor control (refer to Figure 2.4).

Based on this understanding, the first approach to employer branding as management practices views employer branding as an objective entity existing ‘out there’ and seeks for transferrable knowledge on employer branding. Societal influence on employer branding is not generally considered and employees are primarily understood as the object of employer branding strategy. On the contrary, in the second paradigm of employer branding, employer branding is a subjective entity which emerges out of the sensemaking processes of individuals including employees. The consideration of societal context is still limited. The third paradigm, which understands employer branding as critical

discourse, is similar to the second approach in most criteria. Nonetheless, the level of societal consideration in this approach is higher than in the second approach. The last paradigm approaches employer branding as an objective entity and employees are relegated to object status.

The following section is an eclectic review of relevant literature around employer branding based on these four assumptions.

Figure 2.4 Four Approaches to Employer Branding Research

SUBJECTIVE

<p><i>EB as Critical Discourse</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Ontology of EB: A subjective entity ·Epistemology of EB research: Critical realism ·Consideration of societal influence: O ·Employee's role in EB: Subject who creates and sustains discourse 	<p><i>EB as Structural Labor Control</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Ontology of EB: An objective entity ·Epistemology of EB research: Structuralism ·Consideration of societal influence: O ·Employee's role in employer branding: Control object
<p><i>EB as Sensemaking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Ontology of EB: A subjective entity ·Epistemology of EB research: Interpretivism, Social constructionism ·Consideration of societal influence: X ·Employee's role in EB: Subject who makes sense 	<p><i>EB as Management Practices</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Ontology of EB: An objective entity ·Epistemology of EB research: Positivism ·Consideration of societal influence: X ·Employee's role in employer branding: Management object

OBJECTIVE

REGULATION

Source: Adopted from Burrell & Morgan (1979) and modified

Literature review: Underlying assumptions of employer branding research

Although the volume of employer branding literature is increasing, limited consideration has so far been given to its underlying assumptions (Edwards, 2013; Lievens, 2007).

In selecting the employer branding literature to review focusing on its assumptions, the current thesis took a systematic review approach. A systematic

review seeks to minimise bias in the review by being both systematic and explicit about how the review has been conducted. In particular, the systematic review enables the researcher both to map and to assess the existing body of knowledge (Transfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003). These qualities of systematic review are consistent with the objective of the review, revealing the gaps in the existing employer branding literature, focusing on two aspects: (a) employer branding as a socially constructed concept and (b) the employee's role as agent in that process.

Table 2.3 Literature Search Outcomes

Database		Business source premier		Emerald		Science direct	
		Search outcome	Full text review	Search outcome (Article/ book)	Full text review	Search outcome (Article/ book)	Full text review
Keyword	Employer brand	21	8	79 /5	4	45/74	2
	Employment brand	6	1	18/3	2	25	.
Full text review in total		17					

The first stage of a systematic review is scoping studies. Two keywords indicating employer branding, i.e. 'employer brand' and 'employment brand' were used.

The identification of potential relevant literature was done through keyword searches of three relevant academic databases including: Business Source Premier (EBSCO); Emerald Fulltext; and Science Direct (Elsevier).

In using Business source premier database, I searched two keywords in all fields with limiting the results within peer reviewed, full text and reference available ones, and initially twenty seven articles were searched. Then, using the Emerald database, I searched the same two keywords in all fields, with ruling out practitioner's journals (i.e. *Human Resource Management International Digest* and *Strategic HR Review*). As a result, ninety seven articles and eight book chapters turned out to be relevant with employer branding. Finally, using the Science direct database in searching the two keywords in all fields, seventy

articles and seventy four book chapters were searched. As a result, one hundred and ninety four articles and eighty two books in total were initially identified.

As a second step, I examined the title of articles or the table of contents of books to judge their relevance with the employer branding area, and considered grade of journals. In the process, seventy two articles and sixty seven book chapters were ruled out from the list.

As a last step, after reviewing abstract of articles and general outline of book chapters, seventeen articles were identified for full text review. To compensate for the mechanistic approach of a systematic review, thirteen additional articles were manually included in the review, based on recommendations from academics within the authors' expert review panel, which included my supervisors and other PhD students working in the field of employer branding and reputation management. To minimize a few prominent authors influence, I restricted maximum number of one author's work included as three works. As a result of the whole process, thirty articles, which are listed in Table 2.4, were finally identified.

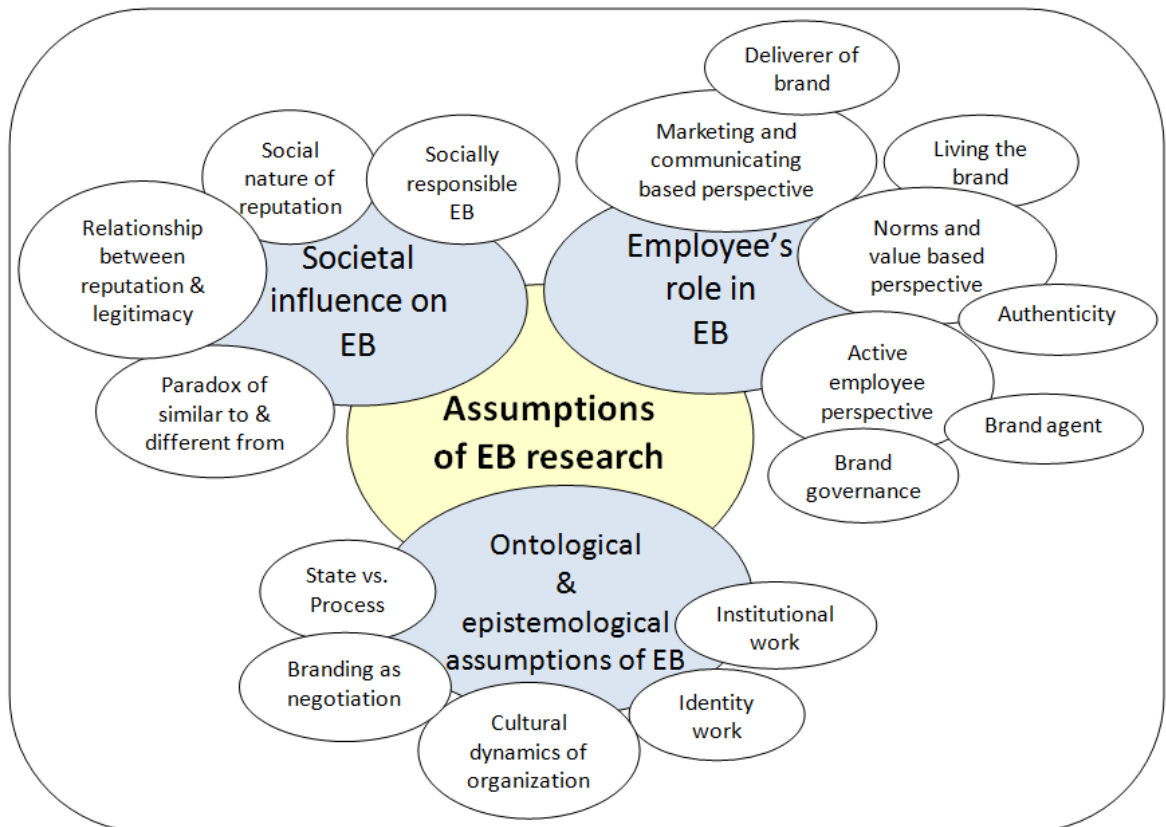
<Insert Table 2.4 Here>

In reviewing the employer branding literature, the four underlying assumptions analysed in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) are used. The first and second assumptions, i.e. (a) the ontological assumptions of employer branding research and (b) the epistemological assumptions of employer branding research jointly form one theme for the purposes of this literature review since they are closely relevant. Theme (c) societal influence on employer branding is discussed ahead of (d) employee's role in employer branding; this ordering allows me to consider the latter with the former as background.

These three focal themes are interrelated with each other, thus some thematic overlaps in the relevant literature are inevitable. Nonetheless, I believe, this approach to the literature offers a useful prospect for philosophically and theoretically grounded understanding of employer branding area.

Figure 2.5 illustrates the central focus of the review (assumptions of employer branding research), three themes (ontological and epistemological assumptions of EB⁵, societal influence of EB and employee's role in EB) and relevant sub-themes.

Figure 2.5. Initial Guide to Research Areas Relating to Underlying Assumptions of Employer Branding Literature



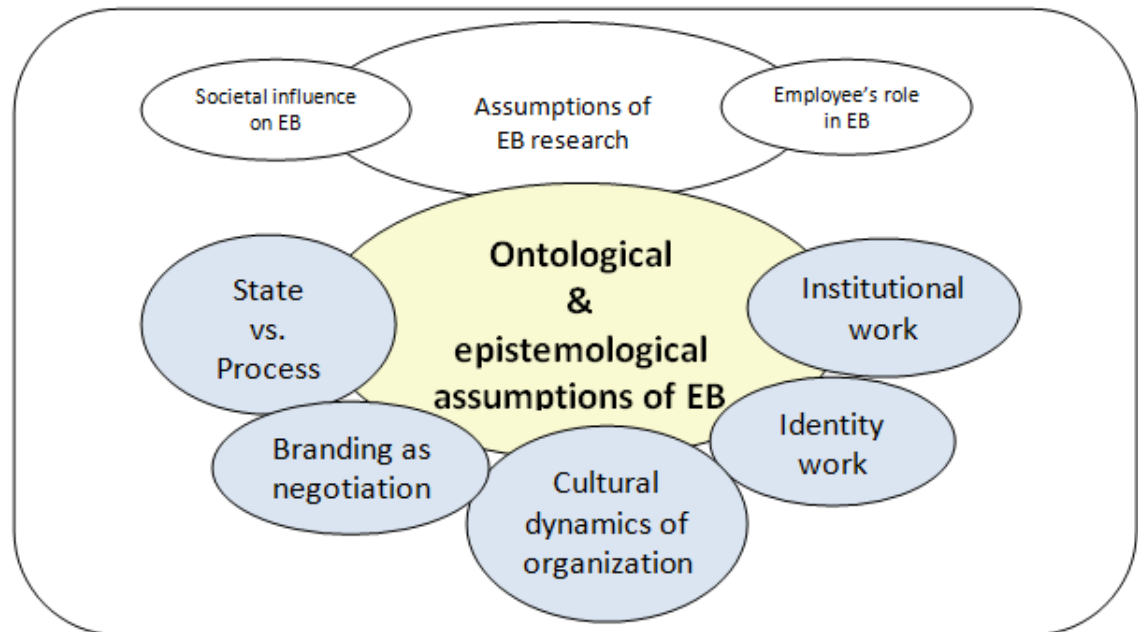
In the following section, the employer branding literature and other relevant materials are reviewed according to each theme.

Ontological & epistemological assumptions of employer branding

Understanding of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of existent employer branding literature is the most fundamental step towards diagnosing the current situation of employer branding studies. Figure 2.6 illustrates research areas focusing on the first theme, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the employer branding literature.

⁵This abbreviation is used only in tables and figures in the thesis.

Figure 2.6 Guide to Research Areas Focusing on Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions of Employer Branding



Dominance of positivistic perspective

Employer branding was initially conceptualized by Ambler and Barrow (1996) on the basis of the notion of brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997), an idea which implies that brands have intrinsic values, are self-contained and independent of any relational influences (Aggerholm et al., 2011). Brand essence (Aaker & Joachimstahler, 2000), core identity (Aaker, 1996), or the brand DNA (Kapferer, 1997) are all similarly static approaches. Ambler and Barrow's (1996: 187) definition conceptualizing employer branding as "packages (...) of benefits" has become a key definition in research on employer branding and therefore the static characteristics of traditional brand theory have become dominant in employer branding studies (Aggerholm et al., 2011).

This ontological stance of employer branding fits easily with positivistic epistemology. Knox and Freeman (2006) quantified the overall attractiveness of an employer as a score and showed that the higher the score, the higher the likeliness for prospective employees to apply. Thus, an attempt was made to develop scales of attractiveness of employer branding as a part of an "employer brand template" which can be applied most of contexts (Berthon et al., 2005: 168). Moroko and Uncles (2008) assumed that there are certain characteristics of

successful or unsuccessful employer branding and identified them. Davies (2008) showed that each type of association of employer branding has a specific role such as differentiation, affinity, satisfaction and loyalty. Schlager, Bodderas, Maas and Cachelin (2011) attempted to verify a direct relationship between specific dimensions of employer branding and employees' satisfaction and identification.

The static and positivistic view is prevalent in other areas as well. Organizational identity was defined by Albert and Whetten (1985), as that which is enduring, as well as being central and distinctive about an organization's character. The most influential scholar in organizational culture⁶, Schein (1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, 2004: 17) also focused on what artifacts and values reveal about basic assumptions, defining organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions... (for) external adaptation and internal integration ...”. Specifically, organizational culture has been defined as relatively stable beliefs, attitudes, and values that are held in common among organizational members (Williams, Dobson & Walters, 1993), shared normative beliefs and shared behavioral expectations (Cooke & Szumal, 1993, 2000), or a particular set of values, beliefs, and behaviors that characterizes the way individuals and groups interact in progressing toward a common goal (Eldridge & Crombie, 1974).

Alternative perspective: branding viewed as a process

Reflection on the static or reified approach to branding has raised doubts about the approach and new perspectives, with an emphasis on process, have emerged.

Branding as negotiation

A new stream of brand management theorists adopts a more dynamic approach to brand identity, as they recognize the fluidity, social contingency, multiplicity, reflexivity and discursivity of identity (Fournier, 1998; Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006), a development prefigured by recent theories of social and cultural identity (Hall, 1996). Fournier (1998) disengaged the production of brand meaning from the

⁶Organizational culture focused on all kinds of private, public, government, and nonprofit organizations. When dealing with the private sector, we often call this corporate culture (Schein, 2010: 1).

grasp of the brand strategist and re-located it as a locus of social construction, that is, brand meaning is negotiated in social settings.

Following this notion, the management of brand identity and the derivation of brand benefits and promises in relation to diverse groups of stakeholders take on new configurations, as the processes of negotiating and the social construction of brand identity are what brand management is all about (McCracken, 1993; Sherry, 2005), and new strategies for brand management are therefore required (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006).

According to this perspective, branding and brand management are no longer a question of transmitting values but have evolved into a process of value creation, resonating with a shift from a short-term sales and marketing-based discipline to a strategic resource in developing and negotiating corporate and individual identities and stakeholder relations (Antorini & Schultz, 2005; Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

In similar vein, Brannan, Parsons and Priola (2011) argued for a view of employee branding as a malleable process, open to negotiation and contestation. Employee branding, defined as “the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organizational constituents”, is similar with employer branding concept yet more marketing oriented concept of branding (Miles & Mangold, 2004: 68; Mosley, 2007). They noted this malleability as a reason for employee branding to be appealing to employers, since it means that employee branding has a potential to shape workers’ thinking.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) viewed brands as social entities whose meanings are socially negotiated. These entities, they argued, are created as much by consumers as by marketers (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995).

In a study of employer branding, Aggerholm et al. (2011: 113) re-conceptualized employer branding as “strategic branding processes which create, negotiate and enact sustainable relationships between an organization and its potential and existing employees.” Furthermore, the notion of brand identity, which provided the static foundation of employer branding as illustrated in the previous section, has extended to acknowledge the ‘*polyphonic*’ nature of employer branding (Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Smith & Buchanan-Oliver, 2011). Smith and

Buchanan-Oliver (2011) argued that employees experienced brand identities as fragmented, complex and paradoxical.

Cultural dynamics of organizations

Organizational culture's overemphasis on stability has also been criticized (Hatch, 2010). To complement Schein's (1981, 1983, 1984, 1985) static framework of organizational culture, Hatch (1993) proposed the need for a cultural dynamics of organizations.

Hatch (1993) construed culture as a process that constitutes organizations rather than a stable characteristic of organizations. In particular, the advantage of a dynamic version of organizational culture theory lies in the new questions it poses. Schein's view focuses on what artifacts and values reveal about basic assumptions. In contrast, the dynamic perspective asks: How is culture constituted by assumptions, values, artifacts, symbols, and the processes that link them? Whereas Schein explored how culture changes or can be changed, the dynamic view recognizes both stability and change as outcomes of the same processes.

Identity work& institutional work

The established belief that organizational identity is inherently stable was also questioned by some scholars (Corley, Gioia & Fabbri, 2000; Gioia et al., 2000; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) who argued that organizational identity can change over relatively short periods of time. This means that labels for elements of organizational identity may remain consistent over time, but the meanings associated with these labels change to accommodate current needs.

In similar vein, some scholars pointed out that while existing studies had cast light upon organizational identification primarily as a state, organizational identification as a process has been ignored (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006). As a concept addressing identification in terms of process, 'identity work' defined as a "range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive

of the self-concept” (Snow & Anderson, 1987: 1348) was suggested. Social group members engage in identity work to create, sustain, recreate or revise identities. In particular, identity work occurs to fit changing environments (Hodges & Martin, 2012). People are supposed to seek optimal balance between two human needs: one for inclusion (“How am I similar to others?”, Brewer & Pickett, 1999; Elsbach, 2003) and one for uniqueness (“How am I different from others?”, Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). For example, Kreiner et al. (2006) showed how members of a demanding occupation (priest) actively conducted identity work using various tactics of differentiation and integration.

The idea of identity work has been fruitfully applied to institutional processes through the concept of ‘institutional work’, which refers to “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006:215). Institutional work also has been suggested as a complementary concept of institutional logic since it is a more ‘bottom-up’ approach, which emphasizing the lived experiences of the non-entrepreneurial actors (Zilber, 2013). For example, Lok (2010) showed how UK investors maintained their identity while a new logic of shareholder value was spread: they compartmentalized the practices of the new logic of shareholder value and those of the old logic of managerialism, or distanced their identity from the shareholder value logic.

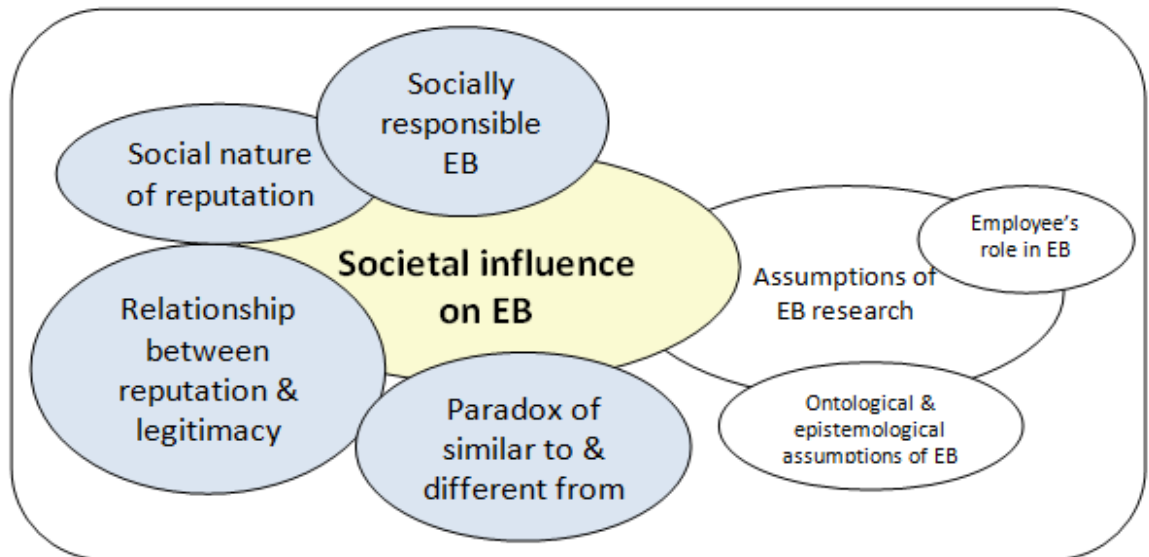
Among three categories of institutional work (i.e. creating, maintaining, disrupting institutions), the creation of institutions has been focused (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009) whereas the investigation of actors’ efforts associated with the persistence or disruption of institutional arrangements has received relatively limited attention (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2008; Suddaby, 2010).

Societal influence on employer branding

Consideration of wider societal influence is rarely taken in employer branding literature. This treatment of employer branding in a social void is interlinked with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the employer branding literature, which dominantly belongs to the ‘employer branding as management practices’ categorization as discussed above (Aggerholm et al., 2011). In

contrast, critical studies posit that HR practices can properly be understood only in a wider social, economic, political and cultural context (e.g. Wong et al., 2009).

Figure 2.7 Guide to Research Areas Focusing on Societal Influence on Employer Branding



In this section, a new perspective on employer branding focusing on corporate social responsibility (CSR) is considered as the early stage of an effort to embrace societal context into employer branding studies. However, a significant gap remains if these efforts are confined to the inclusion of the new area of CSR. Thus, the attempt will be made to learn from reputation literature, focusing on its social emphasis, and to combine insights from the RBV and institutional theory.

Socially responsible employer branding

Recent years have seen the development of a tendency to find fault with a lack of societal consideration in the employer branding literature. Typically, CSR has been suggested as an area which employer branding should include to correct what is seen as an inherent tendency to ignore the societal aspect.

For example, Aggerholm et al. (2011) argued that existing employer branding literature failed to consider societal demands and was unresponsive to societal pressures. They argued for adding CSR as the third foundation of a

reconceptualized employer branding in addition to the original combined foundation of marketing and HR.

Edwards and Kelan (2011) suggested ‘socially responsible employer branding’ from a different motivation with Aggerholm et al. (2011). Edwards and Kelan proposed it as a measure to resolve the current employer branding concept’s conflictual relationship with diversity in employee values, characteristics and behaviours. Critical of what they saw as the tendency of mainstream employer branding studies to promote homogenization of values, they suggested an alternative, socially responsible employer branding which would seek to make people to feel valued and give them the sense of belonging by providing them with a positive and credible workplace experience as key stakeholders.

Most of relevant studies have focused on showing the influence of a CSR component in employer branding propositions on the organization’s attractiveness as an employer, and on employees’ identification with their organization (e.g. Cantor, Paula & Montabon, 2012; Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). For example, employees identify with, aim their attention at and involve themselves in environmental behaviors depending on the extent to which their organization values CSR and environmental issues (Cantor et al., 2012).

Social nature of reputation

Relevant discussions in the area of reputation offer deeper insight into the social element of employer branding.

As summarized above, there is no unanimously accepted definition of reputation. It has been seen as a signal of past actions (Clark & Montgomery, 1998; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988) or generalized impression (Fombrun, 1996; Hall, 1992; Rao, 1994) or an integration of both things (Rhee, 2009; Rindova et al., 2005).

While reputation has been studied predominantly from a positivist perspective (e.g. Fombrun, 1997), the alternative recognition has not been unrepresented, viz. that reputation is socially constructed (Rindova & Martins, 2012). Rao (1994) understood carmakers’ participation in certificate contests as an endeavour to be legitimate. As “an outcome of the process of legitimation”, firms in the early

automobile industry built reputation, which increased the firms' survival rate (Rao, 1994: 31). In this respect, he argued for reputation as a socially constructed entity. Deephouse (2000) criticized the *Fortune* ratings, relied upon by many current studies of reputation, in terms of their over-emphasis on financial performance and their refusal to consider other than a very limited range of stakeholders (in effect, executive directors and analysts) and to cast their geographical net wider than the USAs as an alternative, he suggested media reputation, defined as "an overall evaluation of a firm in the media" in the interest of re-establishing reputation as a construct with a "complex and social nature" (Deephouse, 2000: 1091, 1099). In a discursive approach to the reputation of small companies, Lahdesmaki and Siltaoja (2010: 209, 219) underlined "the constructionist and contextual nature of reputation" which is "inherently complex, even conflicting".

Although limited in scope, some cross-country studies (e.g. Apéria, Simcic-Brønn & Schultz, 2004; Gardberg, 2006; Soleimani, Schnepf & Newbury, 2014) showed the impact of institutional environment at societal or national level on reputation assessment. For example, stock market return has a greater impact on corporate reputation in countries where shareholder rights are privileged. Likewise financial performance volatility has an increased negative role in determining corporate reputation in countries where creditor rights are more protected (Soleimani et al., 2014).

Relationship between reputation and legitimacy

In considering the social nature of reputation, its relationship with another important concept of legitimacy has been often discussed. Whereas a complementary and reciprocal relationship has been noted (e.g. Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; King & Whetten, 2008; Rao, 1994), research emphasizing differences (e.g. Deephouse, 1999, 2000; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Rindova, Pollock & Hayward, 2006; Rindova, Petkova & Kotha, 2007) has been dominant.

For example, Deephouse and Carter (2005) viewed reputation and legitimacy as two conceptually distinct constructs: Whereas legitimacy is a result of

compliance with isomorphic pressures and is thus a matter of ‘similarity’, reputation is an outcome of social comparison and thus a matter of ‘difference’. Somewhat differently, Rao (1994) has conceptualized reputation as an outcome of the legitimization process. King and Whetten (2008) elaborated the relationship further, to conclude that reputation is nested within legitimacy. The criteria of legitimacy do not just define what counts as a legitimate organization, but also provide an institutional frame within which organizations may seek to build their reputations. None of an organization’s activities, including those that seek to establish its distinctiveness, can violate norms of propriety as defined by the industry or the larger society.

Scholars, who adhere to the latter perspective in particular, are critical that the existent reputation research has largely undervalued institutional influences on reputation (Brammer & Jackson, 2012). They make the point that current understanding of reputation tends to focus too exclusively on the economic dimension, arguing for a more comprehensive approach which actively includes elements of legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Kraatz & Love, 2006; Rao, 1994; Washington & Zajac, 2005). To be precise: most studies in the area of reputation tend to be limited to ‘economic legitimacy’, whereas they need to comprehend ‘socio-political legitimacy’.

Paradox of ‘similar to’ and ‘different from’

The relationship between reputation and legitimacy can be approached as conjunction of the RBV, which is representing theoretical approach of inside-out and neo-institutional theory, which takes outside-in approach.

Whetten and Mackey (2002) argued for the incorporation into reputation theory and research of the ‘similar to’, which is aligned with the neo-institutional theory and the ‘different from’ approach, which is most evident in the RBV. Fernandez-Alles and Valle-Cabrera (2006) suggested that the paradox of conformity versus differentiation, which is epitomized in the key question: ‘how can organizations that face institutional pressures and accept their stakeholders’ claims create and sustain competitive advantages?’ is resolved as follows: Conformity reduces differentiation but, at the same time, reduces the risks

associated with the loss of legitimacy and helps in resource acquisition. Such an insight is in line with the position taken by Deephouse (1999: 153): “In markets with strong institutional and competitive pressures, both the differentiation and conformity propositions should be important”.

In the context of employer branding, Martin and co-authors (e.g. Martin & Beaumont, 2001; Martin & Hetrick, 2009) have shown that the conflict between these two approaches cause difficulties on the ground.

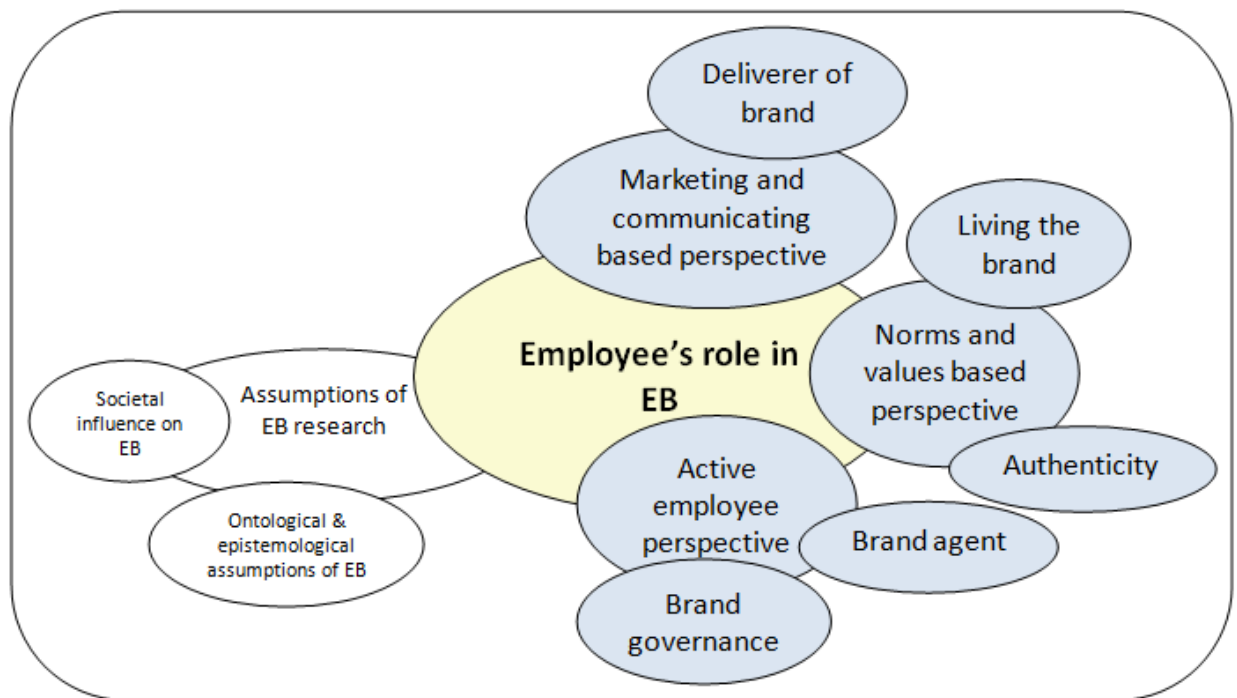
Employee’s role in employer branding

Given the central place of employees in employer branding, surprisingly little employer branding research has focused on employee’s role in it, thus relevant aspects are still yet to be fully understood (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Employee’s critical role in the employer branding process has become a prefabricated premise, while most research either treats employees as passive actors or fails to differentiate them from the organization itself (Barber, 1998; Knox & Freeman, 2006). Barber (1998) warned this as a potentially serious omission.

The last theme of review, employee’s role in employer branding, concerns how the existent literature understands the nature of employees. In this section, as illustrated in Figure 2.8, three perspectives on it are suggested and relevant issues, e.g. brand authenticity and brand governance, are considered.

The status of employees has changed with the development of branding. As industrial economy progresses to informational economy, the values, vision and cultures of organizations have become the core of their selling propositions (Arvidsson, 2006; Balmer, 2001). This increased the importance of brand in marketing and focus of branding was extended from a customer-focus to corporate branding as a whole. In particular, the role of employees became important for the credibility and the coherence of the brand with the advent of corporate branding. The role of employees changed; from providers of labor they became intermediaries of the brand substance, crucial in the delivery of brand promises to external stakeholders.

Figure 2.8 Guide to Research Areas Focusing on the Employee's Role in Employer Branding



Some authors (e.g. Karmark, 2005; Tarnovskaya, 2011) analyzed the relationship between employees and branding in terms of two or three perspectives. Karmark (2005) categorized employee's roles in relation to the brand in terms of (a) the marketing and communication based perspective and (b) the normative and values based perspective.

Table 2.5 Perspectives on Employee's Role in Branding

Perspective	Marketing and communication based perspective	Norms and values based perspective	Active employee perspective
Role of the employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the brand Delivering the brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representing the brand Being the brand Passive stakeholder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistant of labor control Active stakeholder Brand agent Constructor of brand meaning
Management orientation	Communications and implementation	Value-based management	Not focal issues
Mechanisms and initiatives	Internal brand communication, training and development, brand books and manuals	Fostering brand identification through culture-embedding mechanisms, storytelling and events	Appropriating and re-appropriating the meaning of brand as a part of identity work

Source: Karmark (2005: 109); Tarnovskaya (2011)

Tarnovskaya (2011) classified existing ways of understanding the employee role in relation to the brand as (a) vehicle to communicate and (b) internal stakeholder. This classification is similar to Karmark's (2005). She then went on to add a third understanding of the employee as (c) brand agent.

This review primarily uses the latter classification of the relationship between the brand and the employee as presented in Table 2.5 and considers each perspective in the following section.

Deliverer of brand

Firstly, the marketing and communication based perspective views the employee as a vehicle to communicate the company's brand to customers. According to this view, management's primary task is to formulate the brand values and to communicate them to the employee. The role of the employee is to understand the brand values and deliver the brand values to customers according to guidelines provided by the management (Karmark, 2005; Tarnovskaya, 2011).

Internal marketing (IM) was proposed as a solution to the problem of delivering consistently high service quality by Berry et al. (1997). A key assumption underlying IM is a notion that "to have satisfied customers, the firm must also have satisfied employees" (George, 1977: 91). Critical difference of IM with traditional marketing lies in viewing employees as internal customers and jobs as products (Berry, 1981). The evidence that employees have a significant impact on the service experience has been further reinforced by the numerous studies that have identified a strong correlation between satisfied employees, satisfied customers and positive business results, generally referred to as the service profit chain (Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger, 1997).

Employee branding, which is also referred as internal branding, is the concept claiming to take more value-based approach than IM (Mosley, 2007; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Employee branding seeks to develop and reinforce a common value-based ethos, typically attached to some form of corporate mission or vision (Miles & Mangold, 2004). In this vein, Miles and Mangold (2004) identified the elements of the employee branding process as the organization's mission and

values, desired brand image, the variety of communication modes, employee's psyche, employee brand image and consequences for customers and employees. However, Mosley (2007) offered a criticism that employee branding has not overcome the marketing oriented approach of IM, pointing out employee branding's emphasis on the communication-led engagement in practice. Indeed, the employee branding studies advise organizations to communicate the desired brand image and underlying values so frequently and effectively that employees have good knowledge and understanding of them. Organizations attempt to unify employees under a shared brand and encourage employees to present a branded message through their 'on brand' behaviours. The resulted on brand behaviors of employees lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty, in particular in service sector, and finally the organization's sustainable competitive advantage (Miles & Mangold, 2004).

However, the emphasis of on brand behaviour does not allow employee's autonomy in interpreting his or her employer's brand as clearly illustrated in Kunde's (2000: 171) warning:

Ensuring people with the brand is risky business - far more risky than running massive advertising campaigns, where the message - however well executed- is within your span of control. Carefully ensuring that people are committed and understand and accept both the ways and the hows of brand delivery however, can turn a risk into a powerful asset.

Living the brand

The norms and values based perspective, the second perspective of the employee, emphasizes the employee's identification with the company and brand values. The role of employee is to represent the brand, since the promise of the brand is addressed through the behavior of the employee (Karmark, 2005).

This approach to the relationship between the brand and the employees is conceptualized as the notion of 'living the brand' (Ind, 2001; Miles & Mangold, 2004). By not just talking about brand but rather living it, employees are inspired to identify with and internalize the brand and commit to delivering it (Ind, 2001; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). This perspective builds on the premise that the personal values of employees are congruent with brand values.

Such a situation is supported by a strong culture with tools for fostering the employee's identification with the company's identity, such as storytelling and culture-building events, alongside internal communication (Karmark, 2005; Kunde, 2000).

The concept of living the brand was accepted as quite seductive, and other terms, e.g. 'brand champion' (Ind, 2001) and 'brand ambassador' (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), which explain similar perspective of employee's role, were suggested. The employer branding literature generally supports the notion of living the brand. For example, Maxwell and Knox (2009) attempted to identify the categories of attribute of an organization to motivate employees to live the brand.

However, Mitchell (2004) suggested that the problem with the living-the-brand concept is that it focuses too much on changing employees' attitudes and behaviour, and too little on translating brand values into real life experiences. Karmark (2005) raised a criticism that the notion of living the brand has often been applied to the employee without considering implications to the employee himself or herself. For example, 'how the connections among the organization's culture, values and brand expression are merged in the employee' and 'how can we prevent living the brand from becoming acts of self-seduction or self-absorption' have not been considered.

Tarnovskaya (2011) explained general perspective of employees in the employer branding literature as internal stakeholders, and argued that this is in line with the objective of employer branding, making employees feel valued and giving them the sense of belonging, by providing employees a good and credible place to work (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy and Berthon (2002) argued that employer branding studies should approach employees as stakeholders, which was defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984: 46).

However, the employee's role as stakeholder has been restricted to be passive beneficiary one in the employer branding literature. On the basis of the critique, Tarnovskaya (2011) argued that employee's perspective cannot be properly

understood when employee remains to be a passive party. Aggerholm et al. (2011) also called for more active stakeholder approach in employer branding research, not only in relation to enhancing stakeholder identification but also in negotiating and co-creating values.

Authenticity of brand

Authenticity has arisen as a central issue in employer branding, particularly in regard to the concept of living the brand (Love & Singh, 2011; Martin et al., 2011; Mosley, 2007). Living the brand, which is concerned with how organizational values can be deeply embedded in individual roles (Mosley, 2007), is not possible unless “employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organizational constituents” (Miles & Mangold, 2005: 535). However, the potential consequences of perceived dishonesty and inauthenticity are to fundamentally undermine the credibility and appeal of the espoused values (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Mosley, 2007; Maxwell & Knox, 2009). When employer branding is disconnected from the real employment experience, it is usually criticized as normative rhetoric. For example, in Cushen’s (2011) ethnographic case study at an Irish subsidiary of a multinational company, employer branding became a ‘rhetoric-reality stick’ for management’s backs, with which employees measured top management behaviour. Then the confirmed gap between employer branding propositions and reality created anger and frustration among employees. As can be confirmed in Cushen’s (2011) study, employer branding represents the ultimate test in authenticity since it is not easy to disguise the culture and practices of an organization to those employees who experience them firsthand (Love & Singh, 2011).

Taking one more step forward, Martin et al. (2011) extended the application of authenticity, which generally highlighting employer’s provision of employment environment truthful to its own propositions in the employer branding literature, into which empowering employees to speak their truth about themselves. Citing Harquail (2009), Martin et al. (2011) argued that employer branding should move

away from being something designed by employers towards helping employees to socially construct employer brand themselves.

However, some critical scholars (e.g. Fleming, 2009; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011) criticized the discourse of authenticity, which encourages for employees to ‘just be themselves’ as ‘neo-normative control’. They argued that this language of diversity, which apparently allows employee’s autonomy and self-expression, in effect emasculates demands of workplace democracy.

Employee as a brand agent

In the previous two perspectives on the relationship between employees and branding, employees remain just a means to an end, and this line of thought supported an argument that employees have been alienated from the branding process (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Edwards & Kelan, 2011; Tarnovskaya, 2011). While the employee’s role as enablers of brand promises has been acknowledged, an implicit notion that satisfied employees will translate into satisfied customers remains (Tarnovskaya, 2011). Thus, the existent employee and employer branding literature are open to the criticism of treating the employee as “an anonymous workforce” or as a “passive and anonymous communication means for transmission of managerial values” (Tarnovskaya, 2011: 130, 131).

The third perspective on employee’s role in branding takes a critical stance vis-à-vis those existent managerial approaches to employees as passive means, assigning employees instead more active ‘resistant’ or ‘brand agent’ roles (e.g. Brannan et al., 2011; Tarnovskaya, 2011).

Scholars who see employer branding as labor control foreground employee’s role as resistant. For example, in Smith’s (2011) ethnographic study, employees at a retail company used various strategies to resist while the company was trying to dilute gender and class identification through employer branding strategy.

Some scholars raised a question who actually owns the organization’s brand. For example, Ind and Bjerke (2007) argued for overcoming the existing view of

branding as the preserve of marketers, and suggested an organization-wide branding governance approach, in which employees and external audiences as well as managers actively participate in defining and developing the brand. In similar vein, Edwards and coauthor (Edwards, 2005; Edwards & Kelan, 2011) maintained that employees should be considered as important stakeholders of employer branding, with elaborating their approach to stakeholder as engagement focus rather than management focus.

As another active role of employee in the branding process, Tarnovskaya (2011) proposed employees as an agent who interpret and mobilize the brand meanings as a part of their identity work. In her case study, employees of IKEA both accommodate and resist the employer branding according to their needs. In Smith and Buchanan-Oliver's (2011) analysis focusing upon employee's self-representation, they discovered hidden complexities in the 'branded self' which went beyond the dichotomy between accommodation and resistance. They submitted their subjects' self-representations to a polysemic reading – open to as many interpretive possibilities as possible – which disclosed a paradoxical set of relationships to the brand. This approach is based on their understanding of brand as a socially constructed phenomenon which reflects multiple narratives within a particular brand context (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Employees perceived their organization's brand in both assonant and dissonant way, revealing the complexity, contestation and contingency of the phenomenon (Smith & Buchanan-Oliver, 2011).

Chapter conclusion

Summary and Research framework

Summary

In this chapter, fundamental assumptions of employer branding literature are reconsidered with Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms as a framework. Approaches to employer branding are classified (a) employer branding as management practices (b) employer branding as sensemaking (c) employer

branding as critical discourse and (d) employer branding as structural labour control.

In parallel to this philosophical review, the theoretical underpinnings of current employer branding literature are examined. The RBV, the psychological contract theory, SIT and signalling theory are reviewed focusing on the light they shed on employer branding research.

The RBV provides a rationale to focus on employer branding since the theory explains reputation and human capital, which are closely related to employer branding, as resources which contribute to the outperformance of organizations. The psychological contract theory offers understanding of employer branding as employees' sets of expectations on the employment relationship. Beyond the traditional understanding of the psychological contract content, i.e. economic transactional content, relational socio-emotional content, and ideological content, it was argued that the meaning of content was to be construed within the context of the exchange (Conway & Briner, 2009; Dick, 2006). Through SIT which posits that people derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organizations or work-groups to which they belong (Tajfel, 1982), employer branding is connected with organizational identity and organizational identification (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Signalling theory explains the informational role of leaders, managers and HR practice on the prospective and present employees, with emphasis of honest signal.

In addition to these basic theoretical premises, which serve as established theoretical underpinnings of employer branding research, this thesis draws upon institutional theory and sensemaking theory. The rationale for adopting this approach is that the combination of the two theories should make possible to illuminate the issue of embedded agency. New institutional theory, which focused on the embeddedness argument, has comprehended the issue of agency through the notion of institutional entrepreneurship and development of institutional logics in particular. Sensemaking theory, which addresses human agency head-on, is a resource which this literature review has shown to be little used in existing employer branding research, and which promises to further strengthen the theoretical foundation of the current thesis in terms of embeddedness-agency.

As a result of review, structured according to three themes which are based on underlying assumptions of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigms, the following gaps in existent employer branding literature are identified; in each case relevant alternative approaches are suggested on the basis of adjacent studies.

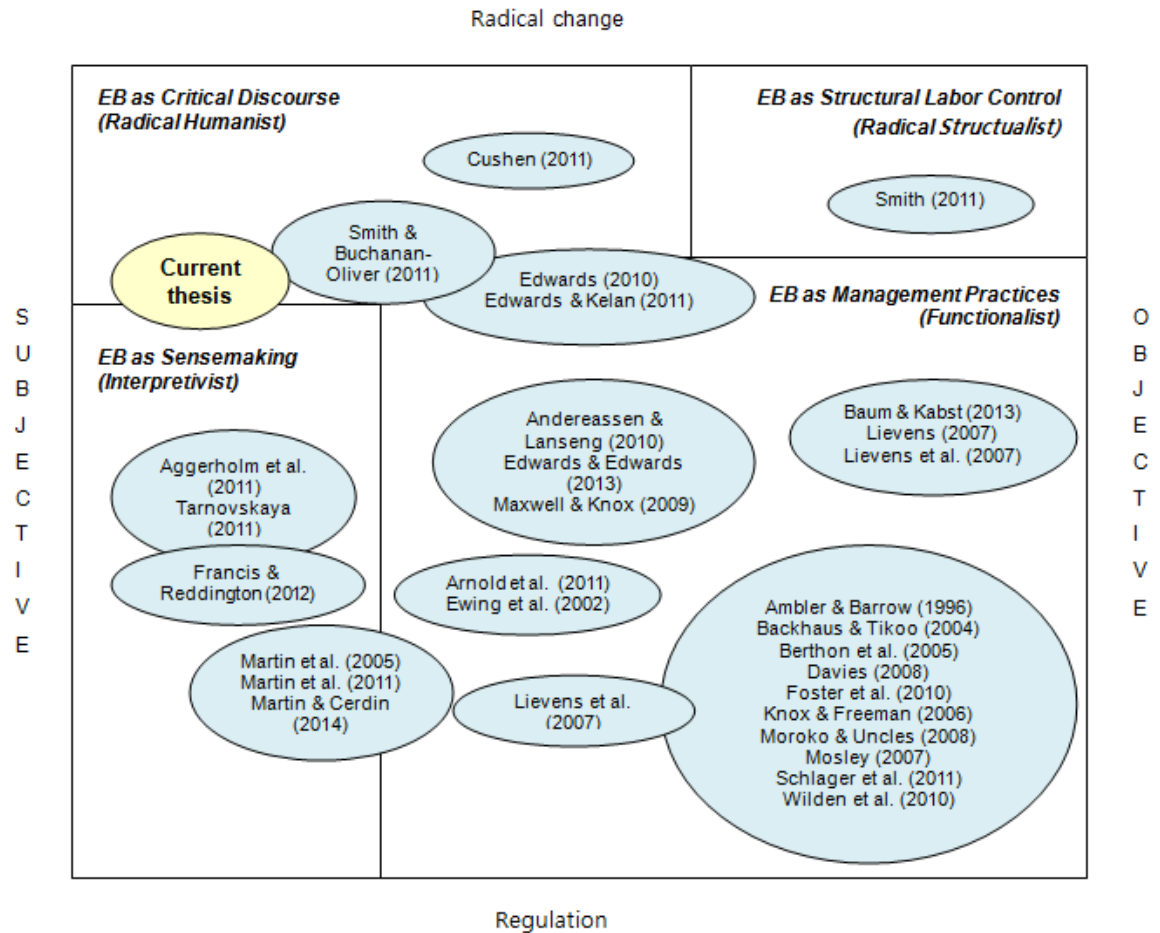
Firstly, a review focusing on ontological and epistemological assumptions reveals that most employer branding literature belongs to a tradition formed by objectivism-positivism. Thus, employer branding has been approached as a stable and relatively unchanging entity. By contrast, the research focus in other adjacent areas has moved towards a dynamic process perspective, as examples of branding as negotiation, cultural dynamics of organizations, identity work or institutional work show.

Secondly, a review on societal influence in employer branding shows that most employer branding research has been conducted acontextually. Most early employer branding studies were conceptual, and even the empirical studies lacked contextual consideration (e.g. Berthon et al., 2005; Davies, 2008; Ewing et al., 2002; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Lievens et al., 2007; Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Schlager et al., 2011). Relatively recent interest in socially responsible employer branding may signal a change since it inevitably comprehends social pressure. Nevertheless, the situation calls for innovative and theoretically-based approaches which will explore and re-conceptualize employer branding as a societal construct. The success of social constructionist studies of organizational identity and reputation suggests an alternative research path for employer branding studies.

Lastly, approaches to employee's role in branding are classified into three categories, i.e. simple deliverer, living the brand and active agent. The idea of employees living the brand, which represents the option favoured in most employer branding research, can be mere rhetoric if authenticity is not established. In studies which see employees as having a more active role in employer branding, employees interpret and mobilize the brand meanings as a part of their identity work and socially construct their organization's brand in both assonant and dissonant ways; many interpretations are possible, so that

such research outputs are justifiably classed as polysemic and analysed accordingly (Tarnovskaya, 2011).

Figure 2.9 Paradigms of Employer Branding Literature



Source: Burrell & Morgan (1979); Gioia & Pitre (1990)

The unbalanced landscape of employer branding research can be confirmed in a distribution chart of employer branding literature paradigms, which has been produced on the basis of the review above (refer to Figure 2.9).

As evident in Figure 2.9, there are big gaps and overlaps in employer branding research in terms of paradigms. Most employer branding literature belongs to *employer branding as management practices* paradigm (functionalist). By contrast, *employer branding as social construction* (interpretivist), *critical discourse* (radical humanist) or *labor control* (radical structuralist) was very scantily represented in the existent employer branding literature. This means employer branding was predominantly studied as static concept, without consideration of societal influence and taking employees as objects. In other

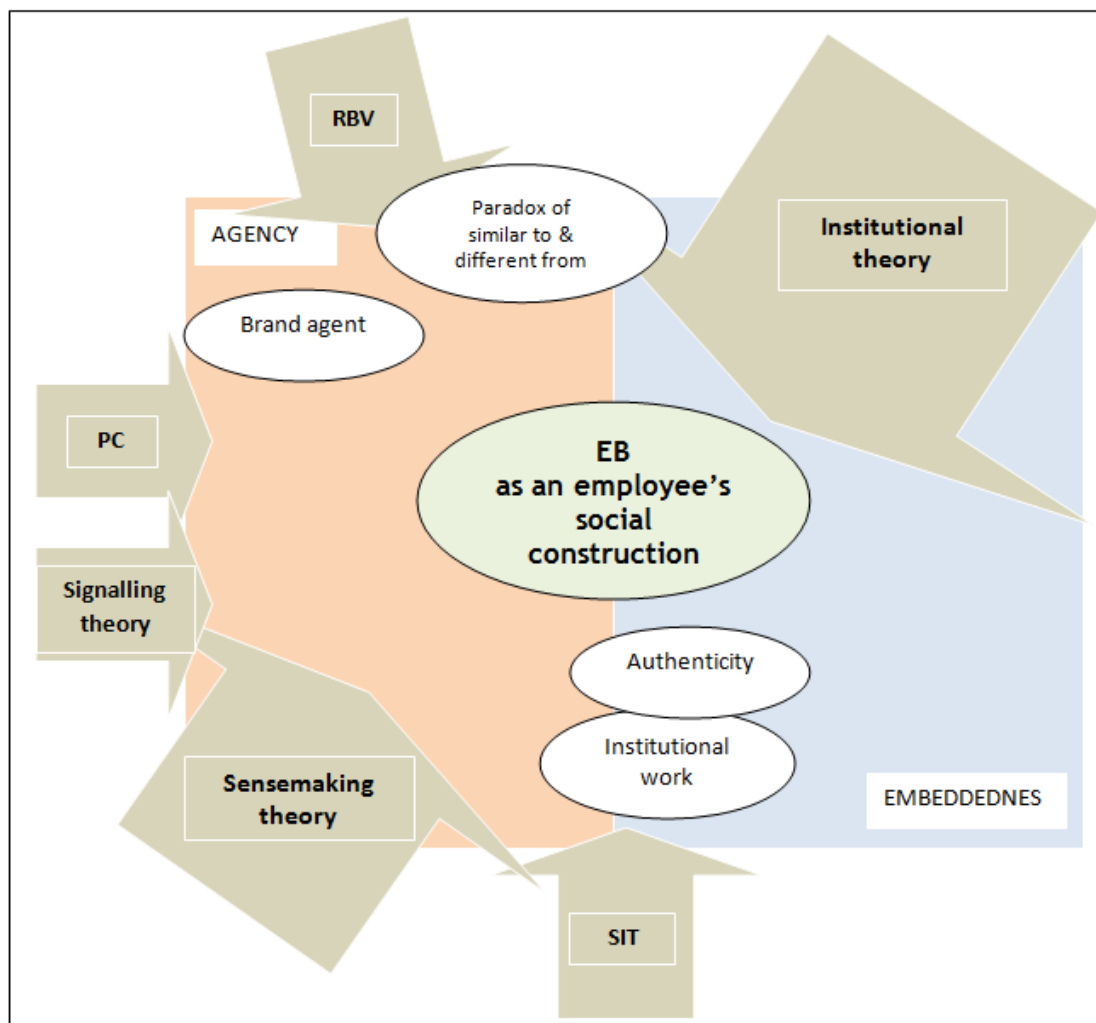
words, the critical gaps of the employer branding research lie in addressing ‘embeddedness’ and ‘agency’.

In the following section, the research framework to fill the gaps is outlined.

Research framework: Employer branding as an employees’ social construction

Through the review of philosophical and theoretical foundations of employer branding research and adjacent areas, the research framework of the current thesis is projected as Figure 2.10.

Figure 2.10 Research Framework



The research framework aims to recast employer branding as an employees' social construction by interplaying two paradigms: the employee focus of the 'employer branding as sensemaking' (the interpretivist) paradigm and the societal focus of the 'employer branding as critical discourse' (the radical humanist) paradigm. Embeddedness and agency, which are identified as gaps in the existent employer branding research, form two main dimensions. The embeddedness dimension is mainly supported by institutional theory and the agency dimension by sensemaking theory.

The research framework of the current thesis is indebted to other theories underpinning the existent employer branding research as well. Several strands of previous research that are relevant to those two dimensions are identified: Authenticity, identity work, institutional work, paradox of 'similar to' and 'different from', employee as brand agent.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter introduction

Chapter 3 examines the methodology and research design used in the thesis. Prior to the analysis of the research methods, it is necessary to outline the definition of a research design, and what components an appropriate research design should contain.

A research design is an ‘action plan’ to connect the research questions and data analysis in a coherent way (Rowley, 2002). Yin (2009: 26) explained a research design as a “blueprint” for research, dealing with four issues: (a) asking valid research questions (b) probing relevant data (c) collecting data in suitable methods and (d) analysing the results (Philliber, Schwab & Samsloss, 1980). According to Punch (2005: 63), the primary function of a research design is to make a coherent link between the research questions and the data analysis, thus the research design “situates the researcher in the empirical world.”

The focal research questions of the thesis are:

How do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea? (Research question 1)

Which actors are the most influential in the employees’ perceptions of employer branding? & Why? (Research question 2)

How does the organization mediate societal logics and employees’ perceptions as a sensegiver? (Research question 3)

Accordingly, the objectives of the thesis are threefold: (a) To explore perceptions of employer branding held by employees, (b) to explore the roles of the management in the enactment of employer branding and (c) to explore the roles of various institutional forces in the enactment of employer branding.

Thus, the methodology of the thesis focuses on (a) acquiring in-depth understanding on employer branding in the eyes of individual employees and (b)

understanding interactions among the individual employee, the organization and various institutional forces encompassing the enactment of employer branding.

Purpose of research: Exploratory

The purpose of research is generally classified threefold: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory.

An exploratory study is a valuable means of finding out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and assess phenomena in a new light” (Robson, 2002: 59). Its great advantage is that it is flexible and adaptable to change. Since I seek to address the gap revealed in the literature review in the previous chapter, i.e. embeddedness and agency in employer branding, my research falls naturally into the exploratory category.

Research philosophy: Social constructionism

It is crucial that researchers examine the philosophical foundation that underlies the way in which their research is undertaken. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, the philosophy of a given piece of research is considered in terms of three aspects: ontology (what is real?), epistemology (what is true?) and axiology (what is good?) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this section, general philosophical foundations are overviewed in terms of paradigms and then social constructionism, which underpins the current thesis, is discussed in more detail.

These three aspects of philosophical foundation, taken together, may be seen to form a paradigm which refers to “the basic belief system or world-view that guides the investigator” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 195 cited in Christians, 2005: 158). In this way, a paradigm “provide[s] a map for negotiating the subject area” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 24) “not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 195 cited in Christians, 2005: 158), thus, discussion of the research paradigm is important in understanding the nature of a given piece of research (Naslund, 2002).

Table 3.1 Summary of Research Paradigms

Para- digm	Burrell & Morgan	Functionalis m	Radical structuralism	Radical humanism		Interpretivism
	Guba & Lincoln	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical theory et al.	Constructiv- ism	N/A
	Crotty	Positivism	Postpositivism	Critical inquiry, Feminism, Postmodern- ism	Construc- tionism, Construc- tivism	Interpre- tivism
Ontology		Naïve realism-A 'real' reality exists which is apprehend- able	Critical realism-A 'real' reality exists which is imperfectly apprehendable	Historical realism-virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values	Relativism- Truth is constructed	Relativism
Epistemology		Findings true	Findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist	Findings are created	Transac- tional/ to an extent subjectivist
Axiology		Propositional knowing about the world is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable.		Propositional, transactional knowing is instrumentally valuable as a means to social emancipation, which is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable.		
Methodology		Experimental /manipula- tive; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/ dialectical	Hermen- eutical/ dialectical	Hermen- eutical/ Phenome- nological (Bryman, 2008: 16)
Inquiry aim		Explanation; prediction and control		Critique and transformation ; restitution and emancipation	Understand- ing; reconstruct- ion	Empathic under- standing (Bryman, 2008: 15)
Nature of knowledge		Verified hypotheses established as facts or laws	Nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws	Structural/his- torical insights	Individual or collective reconstruct- ions coalescing around consensus	Contextual
Quality criteria		Conventional benchmarks of "rigor": internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity		Historical situatedness: erosion of ignorance and misapprehen- sion; action stimulus	Trustworthi- ness and authenticity, including catalyst for action	Trust- worthiness and authenti- city

Source: Brand, 2009; Bryman, 2008; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005

In addition to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigm which is used in classifying approaches to employer branding research in the literature review chapter, the current chapter attempts to take account of other major paradigm systems, i.e. Guba and Lincoln's (2005) paradigm and Crotty's (1998) theoretical perspective (Refer to Table 3.1). Although the specific components of those paradigmatic approaches are not agreed (as is clear from the relationship, by no means clear-cut, among the three paradigm systems presented in the top of Table 3.1), there exists among them meaningful consensus and complementarity (Brand, 2008).

As outlined in the previous chapter, among the major paradigms presented in Table 3.1, functionalism or positivism has been dominant in many areas of social science (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). Ontologically, functionalists assume that a knowable reality, which is independent of our perceptions, exists. Thus, the epistemological stance of functionalism, i.e. positivism⁷ or objectivism, is to search for 'truth'. The methodology is reliant on hypotheses which are rigorously tested, and technical, measuring style methods are favoured.

Interpretivism, constructivism or [social] constructionism is located in opposition to functionalism. These paradigms, which are often used interchangeably, are all generally relativist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). "However, despite their commonality, they, interpretivism and constructionism in particular, developed their own branches or traditions" (Chen, Shek & Bu, 2011: 130).

Interpretivism is generally linked to the ideas of Max Weber, who suggested that the human sciences are concerned with *Verstehen* (understanding) rather than *Erklären* (explaining) which focuses on causality (Crotty, 1998). Since interpretivism was conceived in an effort to develop "a natural science of the social" (Schwandt, 1994: 125), interpretivists have striven to understand the subjective meaning of action, yet in an objective manner (Schwandt, 2000). According to Schwandt (2000), interpretivists focus on gaining knowledge about the meaning of human action then reconstruct their own understandings of it.

⁷Paradigm and epistemology is often termed interchangeably. For example, positivism refers specifically to the epistemology of the functionalist paradigm, as well as to the paradigm itself.

However, constructionists totally reject as naively realist the view that there can be unmediated and direct grasp of the empirical world; instead their focus is upon the issue of how knowledge is socially constructed (*ibid*).

Constructivism and constructionism are also distinct. Constructivism highlights the unique experience of individuals, so focuses on “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (Crotty, 1998: 58). By contrast, social constructionism places focus on the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning since it emphasizes the influence of culture on people (*ibid*).

Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) has been acknowledged as the origin of social constructionism. However, the idea of a “sociology of knowledge” had a long history back to Mannheim and even back to Hegel and Marx (Crotty, 1998: 60). The central feature of social constructionism or constructionism is explained as “a focus on how knowledge is socially constructed in communities” (Hruby, 2001: 58). The world we live in is not simply ‘out there’, rather participants “actively construct the world of everyday life in the interaction with society” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 3) and history, culture and ideology play a mediating role in the interaction. Thus, discourse about the world is not “a reflection or map of the world” but “an artefact of communal interchange” (Gergen, 1985: 266). “There are ‘knowledges’ rather than ‘knowledge’” (Willig, 2008: 7): as between two such social constructs, it is not necessarily the case that one is right, the other wrong, or one superior and the other inferior. Accordingly, social constructionist research does not seek objective reality but the various meanings in which the world is implanted (Burr, 1998). “The ‘social’ in social constructionism is about the mode of meaning generation and not about the kind of object that has meaning” (Crotty, 1998: 55). However, “we do not create meaning. We construct meaning. We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world” (Crotty, 1998: 44-45). Social constructionist research is concerned with identifying the various ways of constructing social reality available in a culture, in order to (a) explore the conditions of their use and to (b) trace their implications for human experience and social practice (Chen et al., 2011).

Social constructionism is so broad and multi-faceted a perspective (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009: 23) that is evaluated as a “mosaic” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 3). It is “radical and conservative; liberating, managerial, and oppressive; relativist, revisionist, and neo-objectivist” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 3). Thus, Burr (2003) confined herself to suggesting the following ‘loose’ set of assumptions, of which a social constructionist approach may have one or more: (a) a critical stance against taken-for-granted knowledge (b) all forms of knowledge are historically and culturally specific (c) knowledge is sustained through daily interaction, particularly language and (d) constructions of the world are bound to power relations.

In particular, social constructionists have shown a wider range of views on truth and reality than holders of other positions (Burr, 2003). Although social constructionism generally rejects the realist explanation of the world, actually social constructionism can be located in a continuum ranging from critical realism to relativism (Harris, 2010). Some social constructionists (e.g. Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995; Edwards & Potter 1992; Gergen, 1985) assume that when we talk about reality we can only be referring to the world we discursively construct. To them, “the only reality that things have is reality that they are given in the symbolic realm of language” (Burr, 2003: 82), thus “there is nothing beyond the text” (Derrida, 1976: 158 cited in Burr, 2003).

By contrast, other social constructionists embrace a form of realism known as critical realism. The critical realists accept that the social world might be ‘out there’ but they suggest that they can never know it as they are stuck in socially constructed versions of reality (Gill & Johnson, 2010). Thus although the individual’s perceptions and sensations do not mirror reality, and although they are often volatile and changeable, nevertheless they do reference the real world in some way; they are not independent of it (Burr, 2003).

The former is known as micro (or strong or light) social constructionism and typical of affirmative postmodernism. The latter is known as macro (or weak or dark) social constructionism and typical of critical theory (Burr, 2003; Danzinger, 1997; Gill & Johnson, 2010).

Both varieties of social constructionists have been criticized for seeming to deny the existence of a reality beyond the text (Burr, 2003). However, many advocates of the approach have explained social constructionism in terms of epistemology not ontology. For example, Potter (1996: 6) stated his position as follows:

I am certainly not trying to answer ontological questions about what sort of things exist. The focus is upon the way people construct descriptions as factual, and how others undermine those constructions. This does not require an answer to the philosophical question of what factuality is.

Berger and Luckmann (1967), social constructionists of the former kind, proposed that society exists as both an objective and a subjective reality, and argued that our social world can be understood as a dialectical process of externalization, objectification and internalization. Thus, micro social constructionists do not deny the existence of material world or that this materiality may have unavoidable consequences for people. Nevertheless, they point out that, once we begin to talk about or otherwise signify or represent the material world, we have entered the realm of discourse; and at that moment we have engaged in social construction. In other words, “what makes something a table, or a rock or anything else that might be appealed to for its materiality, is not a natural essence but the social and cultural world” (Burr, 2003: 91). Gergen (2001: 419) stated that the constructionist aims to replace “question of truth (...) with communal deliberation (...) in various forms of intelligibility.” Gergen (2001: 422-425) stressed that constructionism leaves “truth within tradition.” He explained that the social constructionist intends to bring reflection toward “the often blinding force of tradition” to “reduce the powerful tendency for local truth to become universal”. In this respect, it is argued that when social constructionists state that ‘there is nothing outside of the text’, they are making an epistemological statement rather than ontological one (Edley, 2001).

Foucault, who influenced the latter, also did not deny the existence of a reality beyond discourse, but insisted that discourse “causes a narrowing of one’s field of vision, to exclude a wide range of phenomena from being considered as

worthy of attention, or as even existing” (Mills, 1997: 51 cited in Burr, 2003: 89). According to Mills (1997), “Foucault brackets off the question of reality. Since we can never have direct access to a reality beyond discourse, we cannot concern ourselves with its nature” (Burr, 2003: 90).

Another difference between macro and micro social constructionism lies in their stance towards the structure/agency issue. Macro social constructionism acknowledges the constructive power of language but sees discourse as embedded in material or social structures, social relations and institutionalized practices. Therefore, the concept of power is at the heart of macro social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Danziger, 1997). On the other hand, this approach tends to ignore the role of the subject since it conceptualizes the person as merely the outcome of discourse and social structures (Burr, 2003).

In an opposite way, micro social constructionism’s emphasis of the constructive work of individuals in interaction inherently supports the notion of personal agency (*ibid.* However, there is little or no reference to structure and the problem of power in this version of social constructionism.

Based on the above understanding of social constructionism, I have chosen social constructionism as underpinning paradigm for the current thesis. Although I lean towards the micro social constructionism which views world as discursive construction, I support a synthesis of micro and macro social constructionism – which is discussed in the section on multiple voices below – in an effort to address the structure-agency issue.

In the following section, three strengths of social constructionism in the context of this research are discussed: (a) it directs a critique against taken-for-granted knowledge (b) it opens the way to the study of multiple voices and (c) it addresses the issues raised by the structure-agency debate.

Critique of taken-for-granted knowledge

The epistemological stance of social constructionism challenges the conventional belief that knowledge is based on objective and impartial observation of the world and urges a critical attitude toward taken-for-granted ways of understanding of the world (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism cautions us to be

ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. This means that the categories with which we apprehend the world, e.g. pop/classical music or even man/woman, do not necessarily refer to real divisions (Burr, 2003). In particular, the aspect of social constructionism as critique directed at taken-for-granted knowledge has become powerful by addressing the concept of power. Czarniawska (2003: 13) argued that the mission of the social constructionism is “revealing how the-taken-for-granted becomes taken for granted.”

Study of multiple voices

Social constructionism has been viewed as “deep-structure study of paradox and contradiction” (Tourish & Barge, 2010: 331) and its adoption suggested in the interest of overcoming a tendency of the traditional functionalist approaches to oversimplify the real world. Social constructionism goes beyond surface-level structures and allows us to get at the complexities of power, resistance, and differential interests which characterize the real world of organizations inhabited by most of us. This is relevant in the context of business organizational study since social constructionism avoids reductionist approaches that equate the needs of organizational members with those of organization. It explores where meanings are contested, ambiguous, challenged, and fought over, thus allowing multiple voices to be heard (Tourish & Barge, 2010).

Structure and agency

As discussed above, micro social constructionism lacks the concept of structure and macro social constructionism ignores agency. Nevertheless, some social constructionists (e.g. Burr, 2003; Burr & Butt, 2000; Danzinger, 1997; Davies & Harre, 1990; Wetherell, 1998) have suggested the possibility of addressing the issue of structure/agency through a synthesis of the two strands of social constructionism. These social constructionists suggested that the two versions of social constructionism should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Burkitt (1999) proposed the synthesis of both strands of social constructionism to complement the defects of each strand in respect of power and agency. Through this synthesis, micro social constructionism can address a link between micro and

macro level of society with the transfusion of power concept while macro social constructionism may grant people joint authorship of discourse against power.

Logic of Inquiry: Inductive

A research design is also reliant upon an underlying logic of inquiry. The thesis takes an inductive approach, which challenges the dominant premise of hypothesis-driven (i.e. deductive) thinking and seeks to extract meaningful findings from the masses of data. The inductive approach links well with the exploratory purpose of this research and the social constructionist stance which draws plausibility and strength from the variety of responses from individuals in different positions.

The Qualitative Research Approach

The choice of research approach among quantitative, qualitative or mixed approaches is guided by the underpinning philosophy and the research question addressed by the research. The current study is based on social constructionist philosophy and my research question is essentially about how employees make sense of employer branding. To acquire rich contextualized data on employer branding from the employee's perspective, I have chosen a qualitative approach. Differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches in terms of purpose, specific viewpoints, and methodological approach are succinctly presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Summary of Differences in Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Dimensions	Quantitative approach	Qualitative approach
Purpose	Prediction and control	Understanding
Reality	Stable	Dynamic
Viewpoint	Outsider	Insider
Values	Value free	Value bound
Focus	Particularistic	Holistic
Orientation	Verification	Discovery
Instrumentation	Non-human	Human
Results	Reliable	Valid

Source: Stainback & Stainback (1988: 8)

First, quantitative research seeks causality, prediction and control whereas qualitative research aims to gain an increased understanding of the feelings,

ideas, beliefs and motives behind people's actions. In essence, qualitative research aims to be the search for meanings, i.e. the interpretations and meanings people attach to events, objects, other people, and situations in their own environment.

Second, whereas quantitative research starts off from a single, stable and verifiable reality, qualitative study posits collective definitions of a situation, that is, reality is socially constructed by individuals, so that the nature of reality is changing and dynamic.

Third and fourth, quantitative researchers attempt to study 'hard' facts or reality from the outsider's viewpoint. Thus, they hold that research should be value-free and that this result can be achieved by adhering to objective, quantitative research methodology. By contrast, qualitative researchers direct their attention towards the insider's viewpoint since they believe the nearer they get the more meaningful the data they acquire. Therefore, qualitative research is by necessity value bound.

Fifth and sixth, whereas quantitative researchers, who view objects in a particularistic manner, attempt to identify and isolate specific variables for study, qualitative researchers strive to gain a holistic view. In terms of orientation of research, quantitative research is oriented toward testing or verifying pre-determined hypotheses. On the other hand, qualitative research is more oriented toward discovery or exploration of ideas or theory building: theories and hypotheses are evolved from data collected.

Seventh, in meeting the criteria mentioned above, quantitative research employs non-human instruments such as questionnaires or rating scales. By contrast, the researcher himself or herself is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research since the human person is the only "instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered" in natural settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 39).

Last of all, whereas quantitative researchers are primarily concerned about reliability, which means that the findings of the research are replicable and reproducible, qualitative researchers are concerned with validity, which

indicates whether data represents a true or full picture of what the researcher is investigating.

The research strategy: A single case study

A variety of research strategies are available to qualitative researchers, e.g. action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research and case study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). The choice of an appropriate research strategy is guided by research questions and the goals of the research (Saunders et al., 2007; Yin, 2009). Based on the social constructionist paradigm, the objective of the current thesis is to understand employer branding in terms of interplay between micro and macro levels. The research questions of the current thesis concentrate on ‘how’ employer branding is understood in the context of an organization in Korea. Therefore, the case study was selected as research strategy for the current thesis as it allows phenomena to be studied in context.

The case study is concerned with “the complexity and particular nature of the case in question” (Bryman, 2008: 52). Eisenhardt (1989: 534) defined the case study as “a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings”. Similarly, Robson (2002: 178) defined it as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.”

In this way, the case study strategy is used for gaining a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted (Morris & Wood, 1991). Since the case study is “a way of organising social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied (...) as a whole” (Goode & Hatt, 1952: 331), by nature it is sensitive to “complexity, diversity, and uniqueness” (Ragin, 1989: xiii). Rather than following a fixed research design to examine a limited number of variables, the case study involves an in-depth examination of a single instance through both planned and opportunistic data collection (Gill & Johnson, 2010; Hartley, 2004).

The main strength of the case study method is the opportunity it provides to use multiple methods of data collection, thus enables researchers to conduct a thorough and in-depth investigation. Hakim (2000: 61) emphasized the advantage of using multiple sources of evidence since it “allows case studies to present more rounded and complete accounts.” Thus triangulation, which is a general term for the strategy of seeking to validate findings by deploying various methods, is achieved (Hartley, 2004). Yin (2009: 115) argued that the most important advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is the “development of converging lines of inquiry.”

However, there is debate over the validity (construct validity, internal validity and external validity) and reliability of case study research (Bryman, 2008; Ruddin, 2006; Yin, 2009). Critics of case studies have argued that sufficiently operational measures (construct validity) fail to be identified because case studies inherently involve subjective bias in data collection (e.g. Bradshaw, 1999; Keating & Krumholz, 1999 cited in Yin, 2009). External validity of case studies, single case studies in particular, has been suspected by critics since they consider findings of case studies are not generalizable. Yin (2009) recommended a number of ways in which case study researchers can improve both construct validity and reliability, e.g. drawing upon multiple sources of evidence (to enhance construct validity), addressing rival explanations (to enhance internal validity) and using a case study protocol and a case study database (to enhance reliability). Moreover Yin (2009) went on to argue that critics of the external validity of case studies are appealing to an ideal of “statistical generalization” (Yin, 2009: 43) which survey research relies on, rather than “analytical generalization” which case studies should address. In other words, case studies are “generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations” (Yin, 2009: 15).

There are four case study strategies based upon two discrete dimensions: single vs. multiple case(s); holistic vs. embedded case (Yin, 2009) and the current thesis employs the single holistic case design, which focuses on an organization as a whole. Multiple case studies can be valuable, although attention needs to be paid to the quantity of data which is collected and analysed (Hartley, 2004). As with any form of method, single case studies have both advantages and

disadvantages. The principal strengths of single case studies are that they provide rich data bases and allow access to process information (Kluwe, 1995). By contrast, Eisenhardt (1989: 571) has argued that a study with fewer than four cases is “unconvincing” to generate complex theory. Yin (2009) also stated that multiple case studies are preferable to a single case study and when a single case study is chosen, a strong justification for this choice is required. Five rationales for a single case study choice, suggested by Yin, are: (a) a critical case (b) an extreme case or a unique case (c) a representative or typical case (d) a revelatory case and (e) a longitudinal case. Nonetheless, some scholars (e.g. Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009; Ragin, 1992, 1997) have criticized Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2003), leading exponents of the case study for pursuing a replication logic of multiple cases and convergence of multiple data sources, and for being in thrall to a fixed design approach on the basis of positivistic and variable-oriented perspective on case studies. Viewing these as “giving up some of the traditional claims and strategies” (Platt, 1992: 46) of case studies, Piekkari and her co-authors suggested the need for alternatives: a case-oriented position, case selection favouring those cases which are the richest and most representative of multiplicity, and a flexible design approach.

Case selection

A crucial task in case study research is to identify a suitable case or cases, which can address the research aims and objectives. Achieving the greatest understanding of the critical phenomena depends on choosing the case well (Patton, 1990; Vaughan, 1992; Yin, 2009). A suitable case is one which conveys a balanced, multidimensional representation of the context, participants, and reality of the situation (Merseth, 1994).

It was argued that making a representative selection of cases is the primary concern in case studies (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Yin, 2009). On the other hand, Stake (2005) suggested that balance, variety and opportunity to learn, in particular, are important case choice criteria, rather than representativeness. In similar vein, Mitchell suggested that ‘logical inference’ is independent of ‘statistical inference’. Worsley (1970) stated that “the general validity of analysis does not depend on whether the case being analysed is representative

of other cases of this kind, but rather upon the plausibility of the logic of the analysis”.

Qualitative sampling begins with precise definition of the target population. The target population of the current thesis is established as the set of Korean large companies, known as *Chaebol*. *Chaebol* is established as target population since (a) this group of companies has occupied the central position in Korean economy and (b) it exhibits in the clearest way possible the characteristics of Korean companies.

Using a single case approach allows me to provide a rich portrayal of one organizational context and how this context is socially constructed by employees in different ways. One key rationale for using a case study approach is that it is an effective way of linking theory and real-life experiences (Gummesson, 2007). Also, the selection of the case is justifiable in terms of “its explanatory power rather than its typicality” (Mitchell, 2006: 36). The validity of extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning.

The rationale for the choice of T Telecom (pseudonym) as the single case of the thesis is threefold. Firstly, it is expected that the case provides a good opportunity to learn various aspects of employer branding in Korea, including atypical aspects as well as typical ones.

On the one hand, the case company is a typical Korean company since it is the affiliate of T group (pseudonym), which is one of the *Chaebols*, occupying a prominent position in the Korean economy. As explained in the national context section, the *Chaebols* have played a critical role in economic development in Korea since the 1960s, and their proportionate share in the Korean economy has continued to rise as the total sales volume of the four largest *Chaebols* - Samsung, Hyundai Motors, SK and LG- comprises about 50 per cent of Korean GDP (Hankyoreh, 2012). In addition, it belongs to the group of technology companies, which have fulfilled their expected roles in promoting national economic growth (Amsden & Chu, 2003; Saxenian, 2006).

On the other hand, the case organization is also atypical as well, since it is relatively younger than other *Chaebols*.⁸ It also undertakes a service business domestically in a hugely manufacturing and export oriented country. In addition, it is understood as having maintained a relationship-oriented (feminine) organizational culture in Korea, where performance-oriented (masculine) organizational culture is dominant (Hofstede, 2001).

Secondly, practical issues of access and even the hospitability of potential interviewees, especially manager interviewees, were weighted in choosing the case, since too little can be learned from inhospitable interviewees (Stake, 2005).

Lastly and most importantly, although it was not considered at the stage of case selection, T Telecom has experienced organizational growth slowdown, which was found to operate as a change activating employees' identity work, as revealed in the interviews. In this respect, the case of the current thesis can be categorized as a critical case.

To sum up, the single case study approach is limited in terms of "statistical generalization" (Yin, 2009: 43). Furthermore, the case organization of the thesis is not a typical case, thus, the findings of the thesis cannot be generalizable to other Korean companies.

Nonetheless, the case study strategy enables a novel approach that links micro and macro levels of analysis: The strong micro foundation of the thesis, based on social constructionism and shaped around the employee's perspective, is combined with the strong institutional basis, which is provided by the context of Korea. The case study strategy fits the combination, thus makes it possible to overcome the determinism typical of existing national culture studies, in that it shows in some detail the societal influence on individuals.

In addition, the case organization provides a good opportunity to learn various aspects of employer branding in Korea, including atypical aspects as well as typical ones. In this sense it exemplifies the social constructionism which pursues "'knowledges' rather than 'knowledge'" (Willig, 2008: 7).

⁸ For example, group A was established in 1938 and group B in 1947 whereas group T was established in 1953 and T Telecom in 1984.

Data collection methods: Two stages of semi-structured interviews and document analysis

Data collection for the thesis involves two stages of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I drew upon multiple sources of evidence from two stages of interview and document analysis in the interests of enhancing construct validity. In addition, interviews with employees and managers of the organization, who have often contrasting interests in respect to employer branding, increased the internal validity of the data.

Table 3.3 Outline of Data Collection Methods

Interview	1 st stage	·Employees (13) ·Managers (6)
	2 nd stage	·Employees (12) ·Managers (8)
Document analysis		

Semi-structured interviews

“An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people” (Kahn & Cannell, 1957: 87) “to gather a description of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1983: 174). Interview is “one of the most common and most powerful ways” (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 361) of understanding human beings since it is interaction of two parties with equal status (Benney & Hughes, 1956 cited in Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Types of interviews are generally divided into structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews depending on their purpose. The aim of structured interviews is “capturing precise data (...) within pre-established categories” whereas unstructured interviews aim to “understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization” (Fontana & Frey, 1994:366). For the current thesis, a semi-structured type is adopted since it provides participants with “[f]reedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her rather than to the interviewer”, while allowing “some loose structure to ensure all topics which are considered

crucial to the study are covered” (Bell, 2010: 165). This combination of flexibility and structure is important to this research since it provides opportunity to understand how employees perceive employer branding without preset categorization, while engaging in an iterative process of refinement of lines of thought identified in earlier interviews.

There are debates about (a) how far knowledge is constructed in the interview or is a pre-existing phenomenon and (b) how active or passive the role of the interviewer should be (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). Kvale (1996) explained two contrasting views on nature of knowledge in interviews and interviewer’s role through a metaphor of miners and travellers. In the miner metaphor, “knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal ... [T]he knowledge is waiting in the subject’s interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner” (Kvale, 1996: 3). Alternatively, the interviewer can be a traveller who “asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as ‘wandering together with’” (Kvale, 1996: 4 emphasis in original).

Social constructionist interviews are in consonance with the second perspective which views knowledge as not given but created and negotiated (Legard et al., 2003). Thus, the researcher is an active player rather than just a “pipeline” through which knowledge is transported (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004: 141). Interview is a social encounter in which participants and researchers collaborate in meaning-making work (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Therefore, to social constructionists, there is no single correct answer to an interview question, but instead there is one of an indefinite number of possible versions which is co-constructed in the particular context of the interview (King, 2004; Wood & Kroger, 2000). That is why an active interview, in which as far as possible the interviewer seeks to demonstrate the range of contexts and the interviewee shows a variety of discursive practices, is the ideal interview in social constructionist terms (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

The design of interviews of the current thesis contemplated two stages (the first stage: August and September 2011, the second stage: January 2013). The design has primarily two functions in this thesis. Firstly, the two-stage design makes it possible to explore the enactment of employer branding both extensively and in-

depth. In the first stage of interviews, the main aim was to acquire knowledge of the primary themes in employees' perceptions of employer branding. Building on the first interview stage, the second stage interviews focus on exploring the deeper background of the themes and main actors. Secondly, two tranches of interview, separated by 16 months, made it possible to observe the interaction between employees and employer, encompassing the change of employer branding strategy over a period. This is particularly meaningful since the overhaul of corporate vision which the case company had meanwhile undergone was closely related with organizational growth, which emerged as a potential primary theme of perceptions of employer branding held by employees during the first stage of interview.

Table. 3.4 Guideline of Interview

Participants	Employee Participants	15
	1 st stage (Aug-Sep 2011)	13
	2 nd stage (Jan 2013)	12
	Manager Participants	9
	1 st stage (Aug-Sep 2011)	6
	2 nd stage (Jan 2013)	8
24 (in total)		
Strategy to access potential participants	Employee Participants	Snowballing
	Manager Participants	Access through informants
Interview duration	1-1 and half hour	
Interview venue	Participants workplace or cafes around it	
Means of data recording	·Audio-recording (with consent of participants) ·Field notes ·Transcriptions	

Along with the interview structure, the selection of participants and the specific questions asked have been seen as the keys to good interviewing.

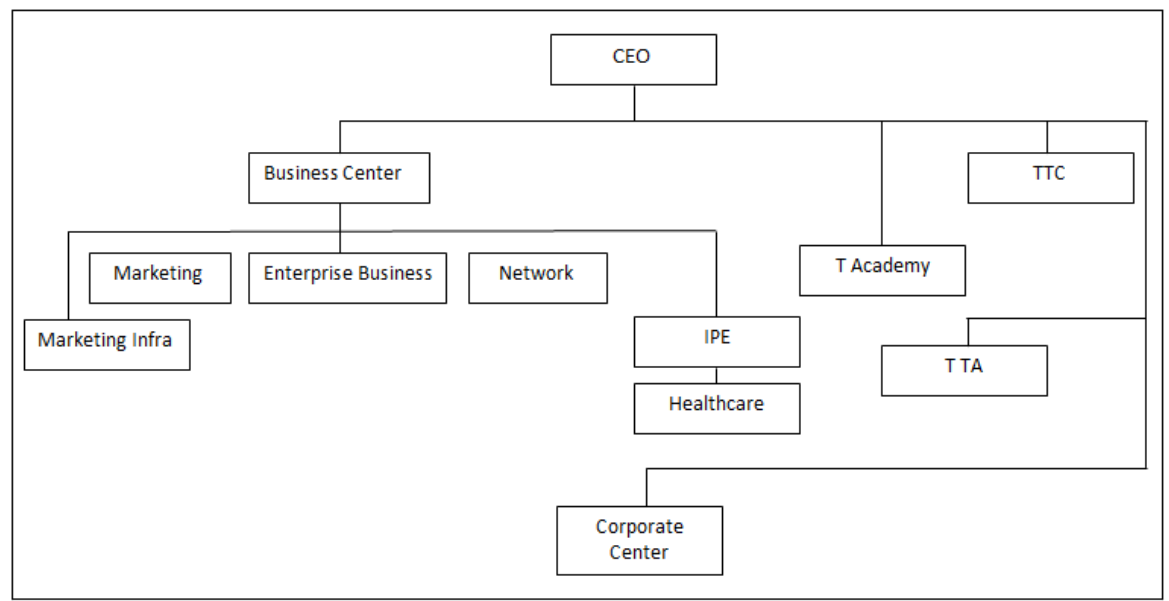
The interview data of the thesis is gathered from two types of participants: employees, who were not involved in the management of the employer branding process, and managers, who were working for the department in charge of employer branding practices. Interviewing these two primary groups of stakeholders, who were likely to hold different frames of reference, allowed me to overcome the one-sided approach of the existing employer branding literature as an employer-driven strategy.

Table 3.5 Employee Participant List

Participant	Department	Working years	Participating stage(s)
Employee 1	Enterprise business	5	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 2 (F)	Communication	14	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 3	New business development	15	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 4	Strategy	16	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 5	Network business strategy	9	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 6	Marketing	14	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 7	Supply chain management	1	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 8	Corporate Relations	1	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 9	Supply chain management	24	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 10 (F)	Social marketing	17	Stage 1 & 2
Employee 11	Communication	6	Stage 1
Employee 12	Network Business development	18	Stage 1
Employee 13 (F)	Public relations	2	Stage 1
Employee 14	Marketing	8	Stage 2
Employee 15	Marketing	7	Stage 2

F= female participant

The principal selection criteria for choosing the participants in this thesis were twofold: On the one hand, employee participants were chosen on the basis of maximum variation to capture differences in terms of gender, working years (which also acted as a proxy for age) and department (although generalizability was not aimed at in the current thesis).

Figure 3.1 Organization Map of T Telecom

In comparison to the organization map of T Telecom presented in Figure 3.1, employee participants were chosen from two centers, i.e. the business and

corporate centers: thus the study covered the major centers other than overseas centers (T Telecom China and T Telecom America). These overseas centers were excluded since, as it happened, difficulties in business abroad had virtually closed down their operations. Specifically, eight employee participants (employee 1, 3, 5~6, 10, 12, 14~15) belonged to business center and seven employee participants (employee 2, 4, 7~9, 11, 13) to corporate center.

On the other hand, manager participants were selected primarily based on their departments. These included HR, branding, marketing, communication, CSR and CR (Corporate Relations), which covered most of the employer-branding-relevant departments (refer to Table 3.6).

Table 3.6 Manager Participant List

Participant	Position	Participating stage(s)
Employer 1	Head of HR office	Stage 1 & 2
Employer 2	Manager at HR office	Stage 1 & 2
Employer 3	Head of Brand strategy office	Stage 1
	Head of Marketing communication office	Stage 2
Employer 4	Leader of CSR team	Stage 1 & 2
Employer 5	Head of CR office	Stage 1 & 2
Employer 6	Manager at HR office	Stage 1
Employer 7	Manager at HR office	Stage 2
Employer 8	Head of Public relations office (In charge of Brand strategy)	Stage 2
Employer 9	Manager at Brand marketing team	Stage 2

Interviews for 24 respondents were mainly conducted during two field work visits in Korea in August and September 2011 and January 2013. Gaining access to managers and employees of large companies in Korea for conducting interviews, in particular qualitative interviews which by their nature involve close interaction with researchers, was not easy because of the generally closed organizational culture. Thus, I used personal informants in the organization I had acquired through my previous career as a journalist in securing initial access to both groups of potential participants. Specifically two strategies were used in accessing potential participants: On the one hand, I made potential lists of manager participants based on their positions in the organization and contacted them through the informants. On the other hand, a snowballing strategy was primarily used in accessing employee participants, with attention at the same

time being paid to the criteria of diversity in working years, departments and gender as much as possible.

Basically, two sets of interview questions were prepared for this research; one is for employee participants and the other is for manager participants, and these were specified according to interview stage (refer to Appendix A). Interview questions for managers consisted of common questions to all managers and position specific questions, e.g. questions for HR managers or questions for managers in the other positions. These questions, however, were produced to ensure a minimum framework for interviews, so flexibility of each interview still secured thus retaining a degree of flexibility in each interview.

The primary objective of interviews with employee participants was to obtain their diverse views on the employer branding of the organization, rather than to collect an exact answer for each question. Most employee participants appeared to show a genuine interest in being interviewed and spontaneously opened out, disclosing in the course of the interview deeply personal stories of their employment lives. The frankness and passion of participants very often guided this research along an unexpected and more vivid route and enabled me to deepen my understanding of employer branding. By contrast, the main objective of interviews with manager participants was to enhance understanding of the employer's roles as a sensegiver in employer branding.

The majority of interviews were performed at interviewee's work place for participants' convenience (Bell, 2010). In the opening of the interviews, all participants were given an outline of the research and signed a consent form in which they agreed that their opinions could be cited in academic articles. Most interviews were audio-recorded with permission of participants. Participants were assured that the recorder would be switched off any time they felt uncomfortable, to minimize the possibility that recording might adversely influence their willingness to talk openly. Recording interviews allowed me to be engaged in interpersonal interaction with participants, which is particularly important in interviews based on a social constructionist perspective. Most interviews were completed within one hour or one and a half hours, yet follow-up email interviews were performed with several participants for further

information. Field notes were taken during or right after each interview to record facial expressions and other non-verbal cues of the interviewee and my immediate impression of the interview (Saunders et al., 2007). I tried to transcribe interviews shortly after they were undertaken.

Document research

Documents are useful sources for academic researchers although they have frequently been overlooked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, one of the distinctive features of organizational studies lies in the fact that organizations themselves produce various documents (Yanow, 2009). Thus, documents can be valuable sources of background information and evidence for analysis.

Documents were collected as secondary source of data for this study as I believed that these would provide an overview of employer branding of the organization, thus complementing the interview data. More importantly, documents are “*texts*”, which is a part of documentary reality (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011: 90 emphasis in original). That is, documents are neither accurate portrayals nor neutral artefacts but “social facts”, which are “produced, shared and used in socially organized ways” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011: 79). Therefore, analysis should not be restricted to the scrutiny of the documents themselves, but also “incorporate a clear understanding of how documents are produced, circulated, read, stored and used for a variety of purposes” (*ibid*).

The first step of document research was to identify relevant documents on the basis they were shared widely by the organization as ‘*text*’ revealing its projected employer branding image. The main materials analysed for this study include: annual reports, reports on HR policy and press releases. These are acquired in the website of the organization or with the help of interview participants.

In this study, analysis was completed in two phases. Firstly, documents were read and examined to identify inductively key themes to be explored within the interviews. Secondly, following the interview analysis, documents were coded using a refined thematic coding frame.

Combining this data with the rich data gathered in the interviews provided a further picture of how employer branding is constructed.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations emerge in research involving people (Robson, 2011). In context of organizational research, Saunders et al. (2007) emphasized that researchers should remain sensitive to the fact that their own presence is temporary while participants from whom they collect data need to remain in the organizations after their departure. Ethical issues are involved in every stage of research: formulating research topic, designing research, gaining access, collecting data, storing data, analyzing data, and writing up research findings (Saunders et al., 2007; Sekaran, 2003). My study was formally approved by the relevant college ethics committee of the University of Glasgow.

One of the key stages at which ethical problems may arise is when researchers seek access (Saunders et al., 2007). Participation should be decided voluntarily while the principle of informed consent is kept (Robson, 2002). Informed consent implies that potential participants should be provided enough knowledge about a research to decide whether to participate in it or not (Bryman, 2008; Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, while I explained fully the nature and use of the current research and their roles in it, at the same time I also tried not to apply any pressure on them to grant access (Robson, 2011; Saunders et al., 2007).

At the stage of data collection, I tried to stay aware that interviews can be potentially intrusive and provoke anxiety or stress in participants (Saunders et al., 2007). Prior to interviews, verbal consent was once again obtained from participants to have the interviews audio-taped. I clearly explained their right to withdraw from research at any time, to decline to reply to questions and to require the digital recorder to be switched off when they did not feel comfortable (Robson, 2011). Actually, one of the participants asked to switch off the digital recorder for a while when he or she wanted to talk a bit sensitive issue.

Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and I made a particular effort to maintain them. For example, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) attended, it is often the case in qualitative interview-based research, that issue of significance can arise in an interview, and researchers wish to explore it in the rest of interviews. This happened several times in data collection stage of the current research, I took great care in guarding participants' right to anonymity. As a practical consideration, I arranged a time and place that are convenient for participants and tried to keep the prearranged time frame.

At analysis, storing and reporting of data stage, treating the information given by participants as strictly confidential and protecting their privacy come to the fore of the ethical consideration (Saunders et al., 2007). High level of care needs to be exercised in making sure that the anonymity of participants is maintained. Embarrassment and even harm could result from reporting data that are clearly attributable to a particular individual (Robson, 2011). In order to secure participants' anonymity, I used labels such as 'employee 1' or 'manager 1'. Anonymity of the organization employer also should be maintained, thus I used pseudonym for the case company. However, as Robson (2011) indicated, in context-rich research such as case studies, the use of labels or pseudonyms cannot totally guarantee anonymity. Nonetheless, researchers should take every effort to maintain it. For example, one employee participant asked total anonymity (i.e. Not providing even label) when he/she mentioned sensitive issue about CEOs of the organization. Since I understood the use of labels could not guard anonymity perfectly, particularly internally, I accepted his/ her request. In addition, I applied the same practice of total anonymity to several other potentially sensitive interview quotes although participants themselves did not express any particular concern.

Another major ethical issue in this stage usually termed as 'objectivity' (Saunders et al., 2007). As discussed in earlier part of the current chapter, the current thesis is on the basis of social constructionism, which does not assume objectivity (Burr, 1998). However, still the duty to not to misrepresent data deliberately remains.

In regard to storing data, all raw data were made completely anonymous and stored in a locked cabinet in my work office and keys to identify data subjects were kept separately.

Data analysis

A major task in qualitative research is to decide how an extensive array of raw materials should be transformed into meaningful findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2003; Thomas, 2004). The current thesis adopted thematic analysis, which is “a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 78). Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). This concerns how the mass of qualitative data collected are disaggregated into meaningful categories. Thematic analysis thus permits comprehensive and systematic rearrangement of the data (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Ritchie et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2003).

Thematic analysis of qualitative data can be understood as a process that identifies key themes and patterns in the data and that establishes the relevance of concepts by making theoretical connections (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Thematic analysis differs from a content analysis perspective, which looks out for frequencies or occurrences. Instead of this, a thematic analysis focuses on tracing and understanding the meanings social actors ascribe to objects, ideas, events, encounters and interactions.

The benefits of thematic analysis lie in its simplicity and flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On the one hand, thematic analysis is relatively easy thus accessible to researchers themselves and readers as well, compared with other qualitative analysis methods, e.g. grounded analysis and discourse analysis. On the other hand, thematic analysis is flexible thus applicable across a range of epistemological and theoretical approaches. Thus, thematic analysis can be “a method both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 81).

However, flexibility does not mean that epistemological and theoretical position of a thematic analysis can be neglected. Rather, it was highlighted to make the

investigator's stance clear; to be a transparent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is a key part of thematic analysis to create and apply 'codes' to the data. This involves forming groups of multiple instances of items of interest under overarching themes within data (Miles & Huberman, 1995; Saldana, 2009). Based on categories identified as a result of coding, I can make sense of the data and explore how different categories are correlated (Cope, 2003; Saldana, 2009; Saunders et al., 2003). Throughout the study, themes were also discussed with my supervisors (Saldana, 2009).

Chapter conclusion

The chapter has outlined the philosophical foundation and the research design for the current thesis, which is on the basis of social constructionism and uses a qualitative single case study strategy and semi-structure interview method with document analysis, in order to understand the construction of employer branding of an organization in Korea from employees' perspective.

Based on consideration of the alternative paradigms, social constructionism is adopted as the underpinning philosophy of the current thesis since it addresses the research objectives, i.e. overcoming managerial perspective of employer branding based on the critique of taken-for-granted knowledge and the balanced consideration of embeddedness and agency. In regards to research strategy and methods, one case study enables me to fully delve into multiple levels of contexts encompassing employer branding of the single case organization while organizing semi-structured interviews which provides both flexibility and structure. The rationales of case selection and sampling and data analysis method are also reviewed.

Nevertheless, I recognize a number of limitations in my approach. In particular it is clear that, from a positivist perspective, a single case study strategy in a single country context lacks generalizability. In addition, data based on participants' retrospective accounts are clearly short on what a positivist would demand in the way of reliability. Lastly, although the thesis provides data with a

longitudinal element, they are based on two points of time, thus not enough to address process concerns. However, I have sought to understand individuals' active construction of their specific contexts since, I believe, such understanding may help develop employer branding as a more robust concept in the 'real' employment world. Also, availability of two stages of fieldwork made it possible to observe changes in employees' sensemaking of employer branding and in the organization's employer branding strategy. Thus, the thesis addresses most of the issues that cross-sectional studies cannot.

Chapter 4. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Chapter 4

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Chapter introduction

“An understanding of context is essential in understanding people’s experience of work”, and this is closely connected with social constructionism which informs the thesis (Legge, 2003: 400). In this chapter, national and organizational contexts are described and analyzed.

National context

Korea, which in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950-3) was one of the world’s poorest nations, has transformed itself to the 13th largest economy in the world in less than three decades (Kim, 2010; Lee & Han, 2006). The nation’s rapid economic development, known as the ‘miracle on the Han River’, has been seen as having enormous influence on Korean people in terms of their values as well as their material lives (Hong, 2006).

The developmental state played a central role in the rapid economic growth which commenced in 1963 under the auspices of President Park Chung-hee (in power 1962-1979), who seized power through a military coup (Kim, 2010; Redding & Witt, 2010). The expression *developmental state* refers to a policy regime in which elite policy makers set economic development as an overarching goal and pursue a coherent strategy to achieve this, with the bureaucracy serving as an effective instrument in their hands (Johnson, 1999; Gough, 2001). The state allocated resources for investment, decreed prices and regulated capital movement (Amsden, 1989). The government’s Economic Planning Board (EPB) was given powers unprecedented in a system that described itself as based on the free market, and the head of the EPB was awarded the rank of deputy prime minister – second in the government hierarchy. Five months after the coup, the Park government nationalized the banking system, and by 1970 it controlled 96.4 per cent of the country’s financial assets (White, 1988: 74). This control allowed EPB planners to distribute resources to industrial sectors

considered vital to industrial development. For businesses, access to low- or no-interest government loans was guaranteed so that they could quickly expand their production without much concern for immediate profitability (Kim, 2010).

Like other countries which had surplus labour, poor natural resources and a small domestic market, Korea adopted an export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) strategy (Park, 1993). The government designated and nurtured labour-intensive manufacturing industries, such as textiles, apparel, and electronics, and later heavy engineering and chemicals as the key industries for economic development (Galbraith & Kim, 1998).

Export development in the 1960s and the 1970s involved decisions which were bold and even 'dangerous', including military involvement in Vietnam (1964~1973) and participation in the construction boom in the Middle East in the 1970s (Chosun Ilbo, 2008). The dispatch of troops to Vietnam was initiated by the Korean government (not by the request of the US) nominally for reasons of national defence, but in the event it brought enormous economic benefits to Korea. The country earned more than US\$1 billion in total from the wages of soldiers and workers and the profits of companies operating in South Vietnam (*ibid*).⁹ The first oil crisis of 1973 also saw heavy investment by Korea in the Middle East, spearheaded in many cases by companies which were withdrawing from Vietnam, and accompanied by the movement of more than 140,000 Korean workers to the region. Between 1975 and 1979, Korean workers sent to the Middle East earned \$20.5 billion, 40 percent of total exports (*ibid*).

After the Park regime was unexpectedly terminated by the assassination of Park on 26th October 1979, another military regime, the Chun Doo-hwan regime (1980~1988), took its place. The developmental aspect of the state was basically maintained in the Chun administration, yet economic liberalisation under this regime saw the developmental state weakened, moving from a comprehensive to a more limited form (Kim, 2010).

These state-led economic growth policies were used as a measure to enhance the frail legitimacy of both military regimes. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

⁹The US provided Korea with AID (Act for International Development) loans as well as military subvention, in return for the dispatch of troops to Vietnam.

expanded by an average of more than eight per cent per year, from US\$2.7 billion in 1962 to US\$202 billion in 1988. Per capita GDP increased from US\$103 to US\$4,813 in the same period.¹⁰ The economy is still rapidly growing and this has led to Korea being classed with Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong as one of the 'Asian Tigers'.

In understanding the rapid post-1960s development and economic growth of Korea, the role of the *Chaebols* needs to be considered (Cho, Yu, Joo & Rowley, 2014). *Chaebols* are family-owned and family-managed business groups, typical in Korea. In the 1960s and 1970s these organizations carried out state planning directives as if they were managers of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Kim, 2010). Nevertheless, criticism of the *Chaebol*-dominated economy surfaced, particularly in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, and the government introduced large-scale restructuring, which led to the collapse of half of the top 30 *Chaebols*. Against this background, the general Korean public has a love-hate relationship with the *Chaebols* (Nam, 2013). However, as the economy recovered, the *Chaebols* have bounced back and some of them have grown to be global enterprises (Cho et al., 2014).

Another important aspect of the Korean developmental state has been its prejudicial treatment of labour in terms of curtailment of labour rights and suppression of wages (Kim, 2010). The only abundant resource in this country, i.e. the well educated, disciplined and industrious labour force, was used to full advantage (Levary & Choi, 1983), but the workers' contributions were not properly recompensed: Labour unionisation and labour assembly were prohibited during the Park regime, and low wages were maintained in spite of the expanding economy (Kim, 2010). As Kim's (2013) analysis has shown, Korean employees have in consequence been seen either as politically weak and docile (e.g. Deyo, 1989) or as recalcitrant and resentful (e.g. Koo, 2001).

More recently, changes have taken place: The absolute power of the military government gradually weakened in the late 1980s, a period which saw the rise of

¹⁰ This data was obtained from the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?page=5> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD/countries>, accessed 5th August 2014.

the nationwide democratisation movement. After three decades of rule by the military, the first civilian government, the Kim Young-sam regime (1993-1997), was established. Above all, with the Asian economic crisis in 1997, reforms based on neoliberal economic principles (e.g. the opening-up of financial markets, the introduction of greater flexibility in the labour market and the westernizing of Korean organizational practices) were introduced at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in exchange for bailout funds (Cho, 2008; Lee & Frenkel, 2004; Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998). Such concepts as annual salary negotiations and recourse to temporary employees, relatively unknown before the IMF intervention, have now become common. With the general adoption of flexible labour policies, it has been argued that Korean attitudes towards work and the workplace have substantially changed (Kang, 2000). As the labor market has become unstable, Koreans no longer feel safe in their occupations and report constant insecurity and helplessness (Cho, 2008).

After Korea recovered from the advent of the IMF crisis (in only one- and-a- half years), successive Korean governments have embraced the idea of creating some form of welfare state, whether this is a 'productive welfare state' (Kim Dae-jung government, 1998-2003), or a 'participatory welfare state' (Roh Moo-hyun government, 2003-2008) (Chan, 2006). However, even these 'welfare states' have been evaluated as exemplifying a tendency to prioritise economic developmental goals over social ones (Kroos, 2013). Furthermore, the recent government, the Lee Myung-bak government (2008-2013), has been seen as retreating in the direction of a 'new developmental state' (Kim, 2010).

Organizational context

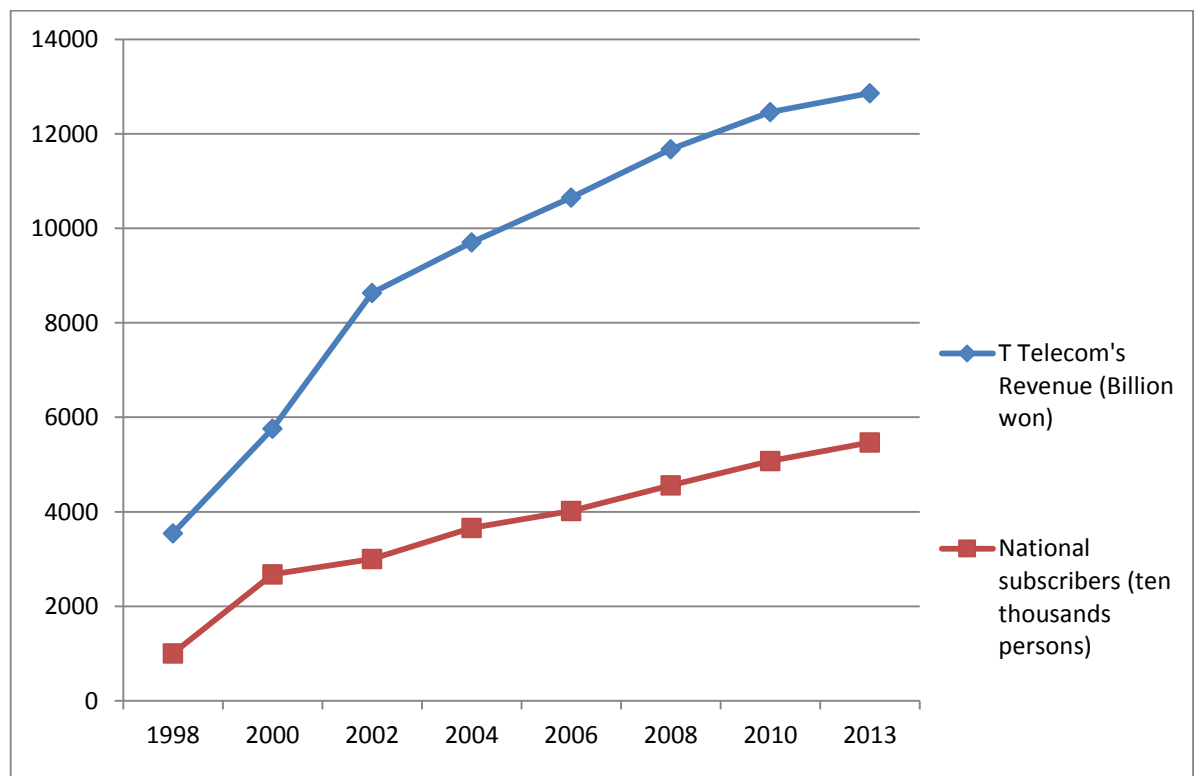
T Telecom is a Korean wireless telecommunications operator, controlled by the T group, one of the country's largest *Chaebols*. Established in 1991 as company I¹¹ (renamed as company J in one year later), it then merged in 1994 with company K, which was a wholly owned subsidiary of the state monopoly phone company. T Telecom officially joined the T Group in 1997, with the current corporate name.

¹¹All organizations and individuals were anonymized, e.g. company A, chairman A and president A.

Starting as a textile company in 1953, T group entered the oil refinery business (conducted by T Oil, pseudonym) in the 1980s, then the telecom business in the 1990s, in both cases by acquiring previous national enterprises as a result of the government's privatization policy. These two businesses have formed the two main growth engines of T group.

In particular, T Telecom was favored as 'a golden goose' before the early 2000s, when the mobile telecom industry in Korea reached saturation. The mobile telecom industry had contributed to overcoming the national economic crisis under the IMF reign by rapidly reviving the domestic market (Maeil Economic Daily, 2014). Its revenue increased by about a trillion won (508 million pounds) a year during these golden days. However, the growth in its revenue has tumbled by half since the mid 2000s (refer to Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Growth of Korean Mobile Telecom Market and T Telecom



Source: KISDI, T Telecom

As the biggest mobile telecom service provider in Korea, where the relevant industries are at an advanced stage of development, T Telecom has led technological trends in the world market. For example, in 2013 it became the

fourth service provider that had more than ten million subscribers for its LTE (Long Term Evolution)¹² service, after Verizon (the US), NTT DoCoMo (Japan) and AT&T (the US) (Herald Business, 2013). It was also the first provider in the world to offer a publicly accessible LTE-Advanced network in the same year. By contrast to T Telecom's leading role in providing up-to-date technologies in its domestic market, persistent efforts to extend its business into overseas markets including Thailand, Brazil, Vietnam, Mongolia, China and the US have been unsuccessful so far (Korea Economic Daily, 2011).

As much as for technological and business success, T Telecom has been renowned for its horizontal organizational culture. It has less hierarchical practices, e.g. a simplified rank system and a casual dress code policy. That is, it unified the ranking grades applying to staff below the level of team manager into the single grade of 'manager', and relaxed the dress code which had followed the strict norms of most Korean organizations (and large companies in particular).

'TMS' (T management system), the T group's own management philosophy or management system, has been established since 1979 in an effort to encourage systematic management. This was unusual at that time in Korea, where the 'rule-of-thumb' and improvisatory approaches to management had been prevalent in the past. In TMS, T group's management perspective, a management implementation principle and major management factors are specified (TMS, 2008).

In 2012, T Telecom established a new corporate vision, 'Vision 2020' which specified the company's aim to become one of the global top 100 companies with market value of over a hundred trillion won (6.6 trillion pounds) by 2020.¹³

To sum up, the organizational context overviewed above is tightly linked with the rationale of case selection and the research design.

¹²LTE, commonly marketed as 4G (generation) LTE, is a standard for wireless communication of high-speed data for mobile phones and data terminals. Although LTE does not satisfy the technical requirements the 3GPP (3rd Generation Partnership Project) consortium has adopted for its new standard generation, ITU (International Telecommunication Union) later decided that LTE can be called 4G technologies due to marketing pressures and the significant improvements that LTE brings to the original 3G technologies (ITU, 2010). By contrast, the LTE Advanced standard has been defined as "True 4G" (ITU, 2009) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LTE_\(telecommunication\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LTE_(telecommunication))).

¹³ This data was obtained from the T Telecom website, accessed 12th August 2014.

As explained in the methodology chapter, the organization has strong plausibility as the single case of the thesis, being (a) the main affiliate of the major *Chaebols* (b) a technology company (c) a relatively young company among the *Chaebols* (d) a service company (e) a domestic company and (f) an organization with horizontal organizational culture. Whereas (a) and (b) are typical features of a Korean company, (c) to (f) are close to atypical aspects for a Korean company.

The case company's quality as a strong provider of an opportunity to learn is in line with the research design of the thesis in terms of its philosophical foundation, i.e. social constructionism, which sets particular store by exploring the various meanings in which the world is implanted (Burr, 1998). The co-existence of typical and atypical aspects in the case organization provides rich organizational context to explore "the complexity and particular nature of the case in question" (Bryman, 2008: 52), with which the case study strategy is primarily concerned.

Chapter conclusion

The national and organizational contexts have been described and analysed in this chapter to provide the exogenous context in which employer branding and the case are embedded. The central role of the state in the period of Korea's rapid economic development and the consistent 'economy- first' approach of its governments are explained. In respect to organizational context, changes in T Telecom's growth are noted and the company's horizontal culture and practices are described.

Chapter 5. FINDINGS

Chapter 5.

FINDINGS

Chapter introduction

This chapter deals with findings based on data from interviews and documents collected. The analysis of data illustrates how employees of the organization made sense of employer branding amid significant societal influence. By contrast, the employer, who occupies a central role in the existing employer branding literature, has turned out to show limited agency in respect to employer branding. Thus, the chapter provides a solid basis for arguing a new approach to employer branding as an extended concept comprehending employees' perspectives and societal influences as well as organizations' strategy.

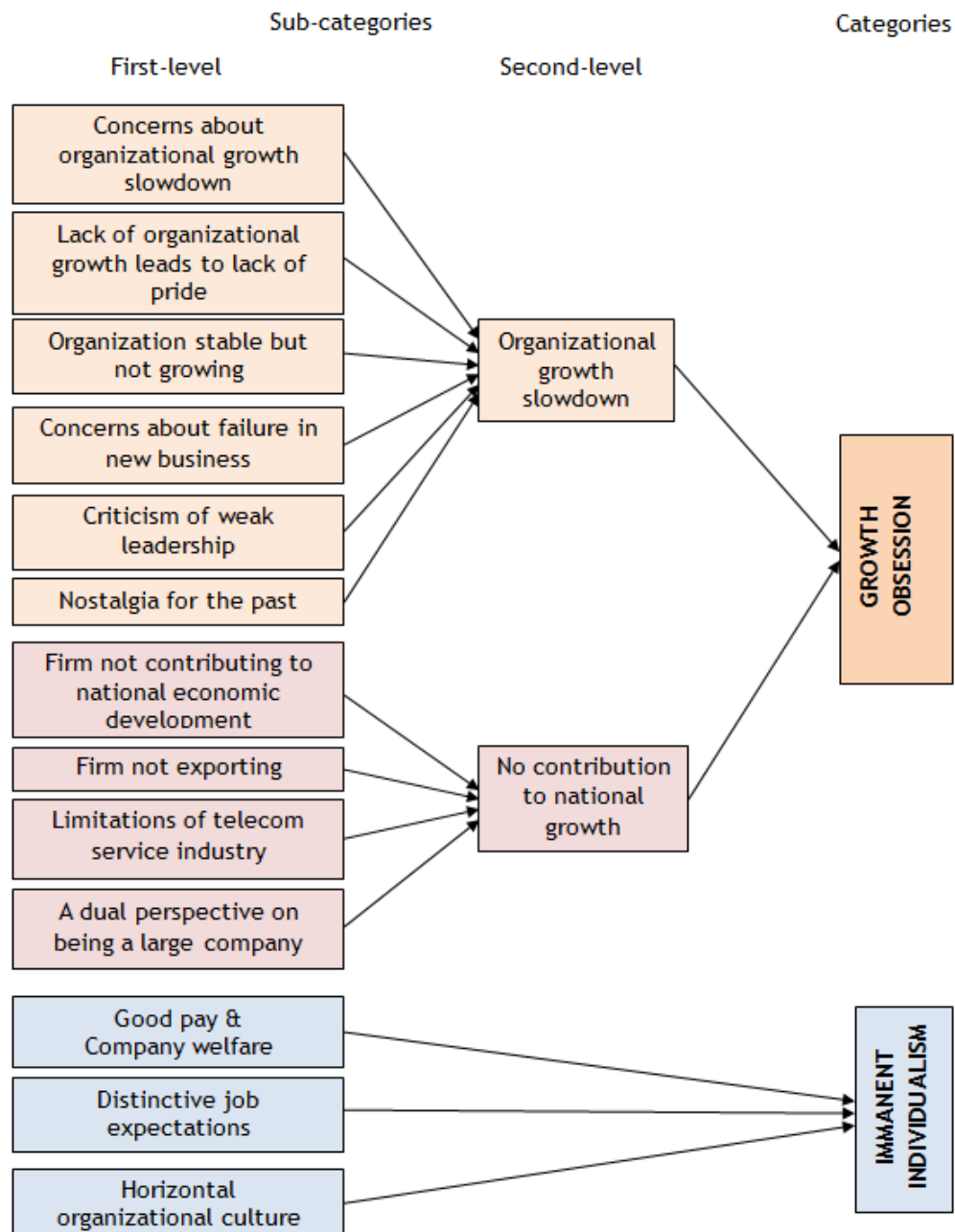
Three sub-chapters focus each on one research question. "Findings 1" examines how employees understood their organization's employer branding. Based on data acquired from two stages of interviews with employees of the organization, two main categories in their sensemaking of employer branding were induced. In "Findings 2", attention shifts to data showing societal influences on employees' sensemaking of employer branding. "Findings 3" concerns the third research question, *'how does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver?'* This chapter attempts to extend understanding of employers' status and roles in designing and practicing employer branding strategy based on data from documents and interviews with employees and managers who were in charge of the HR, branding and marketing of the organization.

Findings 1

Research Question 1. How do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?

In seeking answers to this first research question, I performed a thematic analysis of transcripts of interviews with employee respondents and the field notes I made at the time. Out of this process two categories finally emerged, (a) Growth obsession and (b) immanent individualism.

Figure 5.1 Data Structure (upper levels)



In Figure 5.1, upper levels of data are presented to provide an outline data structure of the findings. Lower levels of data structure, which show relationships between specific data-sets and sub-categories are demonstrated in the beginning of each section of sub-categories. The outcome of the analysis represented in Figure 5.1 primarily provides support in answering the first research question. However, it also forms the overarching framework in addressing the rest of research questions.

As explained in the methodology chapter, thematic analysis is applied to analyze key themes or categories within the data-sets (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It differs from a content analysis perspective, which looks out for frequencies or occurrences. Instead of this, a thematic analysis focuses on tracing and understanding the meanings social actors ascribe to objects, ideas, events, encounters and interactions. In inducing the two main categories in employees' sensemaking of employer branding, three stages of procedures were involved. Firstly, I worked on discovering the categories within the data-sets (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This was done by following patterns of meanings that formed during fieldwork and reading and re-reading transcripts and my field notes. Secondly, there followed a process of "winnowing" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 85) categories to a manageable few by considering which categories were most important for the research. At this stage, attempts to balance two contradictory requirements guided the researcher: (a) which category is more explanatory of employees' *idiosyncratic* views of their organization? and (b) which category is more explanatory of employees' *universal* views of their organization? Lastly, I worked on a hierarchy of categories and reflected on the ways in which these build into or construct concepts and theories. The following sections detail sub-categories in employees' perceptions of employer branding and move on to explain how the two main categories were drawn from them.

Growth obsession

The category of growth obsession consists of two second level sub-categories of (a) organizational growth slowdown and (b) no contribution to national growth.

Organizational growth slowdown

The second level sub-category of organizational growth slowdown emerged from

Table 5.1 Data Supporting Sub-category of Organizational Growth Slowdown

1 st level of sub-categories	Representative quotations
<i>Concerns about organizational growth slowdown</i>	<p>“It seems that there is a widely-shared doubt about the growth prospect of our employer among my colleagues at work” (employee 13).</p> <p>“It is certain that [my employer] would not go bankrupt. However, the problem is that we cannot see any hope for growth here” (employee 3).</p> <p>“We live on [organizational] growth. Growth is rice for us...This is the dream that keeps employees going” (employee 10).</p> <p>“Company A and B are so growing that employees of them may think they can achieve personal growth if they work hard for their employer. Isn’t it ideal that employees grow with their organization? However, it becomes a bit difficult for us to achieve personal growth accompanying organizational growth in our company (employee 1).</p>
<i>Lack of organizational growth leads to lack of pride</i>	<p>“If my employer openly declares that we are company like company D, I will leave this company right that time...if the drug is not injected any more, then there is no reason for me to stay with this company” (employee 14).</p>
<i>Organization not growing but stable</i>	<p>“...although it does not grow, it will not go backward at least. Your interests will be secured and there will be no problem for you to live at the level of employees of public companies...We don’t need to stay a red-hot competitive market” (employee 15).</p>
<i>Concerns about failure in new business</i>	<p>“It seems that there is strong sense of defeat that we have missed all achievements possible for the last two to three years despite our status as the number one service provider of ICT, a sector marked by the highest rates of growth. Employees’ pride may be damaged” (employee 14).</p>
<i>Criticism of weak leadership</i>	<p>“I rated previous chairman B very highly for his insight and his instinctive feeling for the market. Even just considering only one fact, that he tried more than thirty years ago to make energy and telecoms our main businesses, this tells me how great he was” (employee 1).</p> <p>“Although chairman D is inarticulate in his speech and has been criticized in terms of various aspects, he seems to bring a new agenda to our society” (anonymous participant).</p> <p>“When president C stepped down, my dream was damaged” (anonymous participant).</p>
<i>Nostalgia for the past</i>	<p>“My employer was great by the early 2000s. My senior colleagues miss the old days a lot...It was hard to join my employer...pride [as an employee of my employer] was high” (employee 1).</p> <p>“I feel like I’m seeing the worn-out wreck of my father – a man who always looked several times stronger than me and always with a well-stuffed wallet” (employee 6).</p>

six first sub-categories, (a) concerns about organizational growth slowdown (b) lack of organizational growth leads to lack of pride (c) organization not growing but stable (d) concerns about failure in new business (e) criticism of weak leadership and (f) nostalgia for the past. Table 5.1 presents the first levels of sub-categories and the relevant quotations which support the sub-category of organizational growth slowdown.

Concerns about organizational growth slowdown

Concerns about organizational growth (English translation of Korean word ‘*sungjang*’) slowdown were pervasive in employees’ sensemaking of employer branding. Working for a company that achieved high growth, which was the case of the organization before the early 2000s, was the basis for employees feeling pride in the company and a warrant of job security. More recently, perceptions of stagnating growth fed into declining levels of pride and job security. Although the supremacy of growth is prevalent in the business world, the idea had a particular attraction for employees of the organization. It is particularly noteworthy that at the level of general tendencies organizational growth is the main concern of managers rather than employees. These points are illustrated in the quotations below.

The biggest reason is the slowdown of organizational growth...By the time I joined my employer, my employer was the favourite of all prospective employees in Korea...However, as there is a question mark about growth nowadays...(employee 1)¹⁴.

Before I entered this company, I simply thought that there is no possibility that a telecom company would go bankrupt anyway and didn’t think over the issue a lot. However, after joining my employer...I tend to think about organizational growth more and more...It seems that there is a widely-shared doubt about the growth prospect of our employer among my colleagues at work (employee 13).

Whenever my employer does a survey on itself, it has been revealed that it does not have an image of growth (employee 2).

¹⁴Although interviews were conducted in two stages, the stage of a particular interview quotation will be noted only when the difference of stage is important in understanding implications of the quotation.

[I guess my employer] has entered the period of stability, without more growth (employee 15).

It is certain that [my employer] would not go bankrupt. However, the problem is that we cannot see any hope for growth here (employee 3).

Employees perceived that the slowdown of organizational growth was not confined to the organization, but a widespread phenomenon among Korean companies, as illustrated in the interview excerpt of employee 4 below. Employees perceived that most Korean companies, except for a very limited number, e.g. company A or B, had passed through the high growth period and entered the low growth period, so that the organization was no more than an example of the general trend among Korean companies in this sense.

Overall, the situation is becoming worse. I think this applies to most Korean companies. Which industries [or companies] are enjoying a boom at the moment? Company A or B? Except for a very limited number of companies, the situation of most [Korean] companies isn't good, is it? (employee 4).

The high interest in organizational growth was based on the widely-shared notion that 'company growth directly translates into personal growth.' According to this idea, no personal growth was possible for the employee if his or her employer was not seen to be growing.

We live on [organizational] growth. Growth is rice for us...This is the dream that keeps employees going (employee 10).

Business is the most important thing. Only by developing a business model through which company keeps growing...[can the employer provide] hopes to new employees (employee 2).

What I am saying is that there is no growth in this company. Employees may follow their employer's growth...so there are feelings of insecurity about the long term (employee 9).

[It is usual] that organizational growth migrates to personal growth, but...[because of the slowdown of organizational growth] there is no position [for employees] to be promoted to. It is a situation that [I can secure my post as a team manager] only when the current team manager is fired (employee 10).

Company A and B are growing, so that their employees may think they can achieve personal growth if they work hard for their employer. Isn't it ideal that employees grow with their organization? However, it becomes a bit difficult for us to achieve personal growth accompanying organizational growth in our company (employee 1).

As the employer grows, individuals belonging to it also can grow. [However, nowadays] I feel like I am wasting my time. I haven't felt this way before (employee 10).

As can be seen in the interview excerpts above, personal growth meant various things: it could be confined to employees' sustaining their own jobs (as in the quotation from employee 9) or it might specifically mean promotion (as in the fourth quotation, from employee 10), but in most cases it has a more comprehensive sense, envisaging the broader development of the employee's competencies.

Lack of organizational growth leads to lack of pride

In particular, it is noteworthy that most employee respondents considered organizational growth as a matter of their own pride.

I cannot feel pride as a member of T Telecom any more (employee 10).

Let's say, I joined my employer understanding it as red, afterwards all of sudden it shouts 'Actually, I am green [not red], surprise!' ...it would be total anomie...It would probably make sense for my employer to have itself painted green, to show it is seeking an identity based on stability. However, I will leave this company at the moment I accept the idea...If my employer openly declares that we are company like company D, I will leave this company right there and then...if the drug is not injected any more, then there is no reason for me to stay with this company (employee 14).

In the early 2000s, some industrial experts forecasted that my employer would follow the track of company E. While our employer enjoyed high growth, we didn't believe what these experts said and thought that we could be different...However, although it is unbearable to say this out loud, it seems that all of us are now conceding that the forecast was right...We hate to acknowledge it, but we privately think that our employer has become just like company E. We will probably express that kind

of idea openly soon and that's what scares me the most. This would undermine morale of junior colleagues who are willing to work hard...I didn't think that I entered a company like company E when I joined my employer (employee 6).

As illustrated obviously in the quotation of employee 14, even nominal maintenance of a vision which was oriented in organizational growth was a critical issue to some employees. Although they conceded that their employer had not addressed growth-oriented vision, at least it provided symbolic value with employees. Thus, they supposed that, if the organization gave up growth orientation and explicitly conceded that its corporate identity was oriented towards stability, they could read this as a critical signal putting pay to their remaining pride as employees of the organization. For those employees, as employee 14 and 6 explicitly mentioned above, the fact that their employer had become similar with previous or current public corporations, e.g. company D or E, was a matter of shame.

Organization stable but not growing

Quite differently from the reactions described above, some employees understood organizational growth slowdown as a matter of job security rather than pride.

My colleagues worry a lot about the growth slowdown but whenever I hear people say this, I say that's why our employer can be rather a cool one. It is because, although it does not grow, at least it will not go backward. Your interests will be secured and there will be no problem for you to live at the level of employees of public companies...We don't need to stay a red-hot competitive market (employee 15).

Although [my employer's] growth has suspended, it is still the best in terms of stability after public companies and financial companies (employee 9).

To them the notion that their employer was becoming similar to company D or E meant the promise of a relaxing and stable life, which satisfied what they primarily expected from their employer, i.e. job security.

Concerns about failure in new business

Constant failures in developing new businesses had a negative influence on employees' perceptions of employer branding.

It seems that there is strong sense of defeat that we have missed all achievements possible for the last two to three years despite our status as the number one service provider of ICT(information and communication technology), a sector marked by the highest rates of growth. Employees' pride may be damaged (employee 14).

...the leadership position of my employer as an ICT company has weakened. As an organization which was innovative and used to have excellent ability to lead trends in the market, its pride is damaged, I think (employee 12).

Above, employee 14 talked about a sense of defeat among his colleagues due to the failures in new businesses. Employee 12 linked failures in developing new businesses with damage to the company's leadership in the market as a trend-setter. Both employees associated it with the loss of pride.

A similar set of concerns is voiced by an employee who worked in a team which failed in developing overseas markets. This employee raised the possibility that the current conservative management of his employer, which has resulted in repeated failures in establishing new businesses, including businesses abroad, may lead to another loss of opportunities:

[My employer] is relocating employees from new business divisions to a traditional business division since the former have persistently failed to show a profit. Most of them have been transferred to the sales department...However, the problem is, I think, that if our human resource is too much skewed towards sales, our readiness for new business opportunities will become even worse. [As an illustration,] to do baseball well, we need to have both major and minor teams. However, our situation is that we transfer baseball players to the football team because their records are bad in the short term...My employer has probably had a good kicking from its shareholders for its failures in developing business abroad. It probably feels embarrassed by the need to keep defending its repeated efforts to get into overseas markets, attempts which have shown no positive results (employee 6).

Criticism of weak leadership

The data show that employees of the organization perceived lack of leadership at various levels, i.e. leadership of the top management including chairman of the group and CEO and directors at executive level. This phenomenon can also be understood in connection with growth slowdown since the leadership crisis was directly or indirectly associated with it according to my data. In presenting interview quotations which described a specific leader of the organization negatively, I totally anonymize participants to strengthen their privacy.

It is certainly true that employees in some cases gave positive evaluations on the current chairman A, as in the quotation below.

[Part of the reasons why our organizational culture is different from other companies] seems to be due to the chairman of ours. He is young, and you could say that the organization itself has in some ways got younger...There was a round-table conference with the chairman right after I joined this company. Contrary to my natural assumption that he would come in a business suit, he showed up in a t-shirt and leather jacket. He looked cool...I thought, 'Wow, he is different [from other chairmen of Chaebols] even in the matter of his clothes (employee 7).

However, such a favourable evaluation is the exception rather than the rule. The leadership of the current chairman was overshadowed by that of the previous chairman B, the father of the current chairman, who founded the organization and passed away fifteen years ago:

I rated the previous chairman B, very highly for his insight and instinctive feeling for the market. Even just considering only one fact, that he tried more than thirty years ago to make energy and telecoms our main businesses, this tells me how great he was (employee 1).

The reason I decided to join T Telecom is...although previous chairman B was dead, I really liked his views on human resources. I expected that human resources would be given key significance in this company according to his philosophy. Yet I found that the tradition has not been kept (employee 1).

First of all, since the previous chairman established a good framework [such as TMS]...(employee 11).

I think highly of [the previous] chairman B and I don't think I'm only person who does. I guess there is some level of consensus [on evaluation on the chairman B among people] let alone other [chairmen of Chaebols]...Although the current chairman has a bit of a bad reputation (anonymous participant).

The quotations above illustrate that employees respected the previous chairman B based on his philosophy of HR (employee 1) and systematic management through TMS (employee 11). However, as employee 1 mentioned in the first quotation above, the leadership of chairman B was above all exemplified by his foresight in developing new businesses.

In addition, the current chairman was often compared with leaders of other groups, chairman D (group A) and vice chairman A (group B), and such comparisons typically led to an unfavourable evaluation of the current chairman in the context of his perceived capability of leading organization growth. Furthermore, chairman A had been involved in several lawsuits, thus considered as one of the biggest risk factors of the group as attested by the last quotation below. These points are illustrated in the interview excerpts below.

The current chairman often talks about matters which are complex to understand, and it is difficult for anybody to say what was the punch line. Although chairman D is inarticulate in his speech and has been criticized in terms of various aspects, he seems to be offering our society a new agenda (anonymous participant).

Look at what vice chairman A has achieved. Our chairman's achievement is poor, not even up to what you expect from third generation Chaebol management (anonymous participant).

Top executives are also employees. The most important thing is what the chairman is thinking...There is nothing [in him] that would lead employees to be willing to go the extra mile for him (anonymous participant).

Negative issues regarding the chairman have emerged continuously. This is a serious matter, since the system will only work when we have respect for the man at the top (anonymous participant).

As mentioned in the last quotation above, the lack of leadership of top management is significant in the context of Korea since the status of chairman in

Chaebol inside the organization has traditionally been supposed to be absolute, dominant and crucial.

Another lack of leadership of top management emerged in respect to the CEO of the organization. It is normal that professional executives who are non-members of the founding family have limited leadership in *Chaebol* since they are also considered as employed by the founding family. However, it is notable that the current CEO of the organization, president A, seemed to have more difficulties in assuring his leadership position, because of his perceived identity as a management-oriented CEO rather than a growth-oriented CEO. This was because he had mainly worked in the finance division of the company, unlike most of previous CEOs including presidents B and C, who had worked in the business division. It is evident that this issue connected with the growth obsessed aspect of the employer brand.

[He is] from finance. He is a man who still proudly says that his main job used to be filling out spreadsheets – whenever he becomes drunk...He may be able to do a good job as a manager but...(anonymous participant).

[If we had previous] president B or C as current one, the situation would be a bit different. It is the leader who is the most influential in an organization and in fact employees are very often susceptible. If the atmosphere is good, they are easily swayed and a positive virus will spread in the organization...Even if a corporate vision is groundless, if they perceive it as achievable for any reason, then they will go to any lengths to accomplish it (anonymous participant).

The point is revealed even more strikingly in the quotation below.

It is important to make business successful, yet persons who transmit [organizational culture] are also required...[In that sense,] the role of leaders is important. I think [the previous] president C did this well...When president C stepped down and president A came as the new CEO, my pride as a member of T Telecom was considerably hurt. [It's because I thought that] they replaced a growth-oriented CEO with a management-oriented one...I don't know how many other colleagues accepted the appointment of the CEO the same way as I did, but to some extent I considered it as the signal that the period of growth of my employer is finished...When president C was in office, I've seen top executives come out of a meeting with him with their

eyes swimming with tears ready to work their fingers to the bone just for his sake. That was the only period I've ever seen that kind of scene...[Our top management] may try to make an excuse of the business slowdown, but the business situation during president C's term was also not good [but the atmosphere of my company was quite different]...If we cannot change business, we need to motivate people by changing our culture but...When president C stepped down, my dream was damaged...at that time I even wrote him a personal e-mail in which I said that, when I saw him collapse, I felt that my heart was breaking (anonymous participant).

It was not just top management which was seen to be failing in leadership. The lack was also perceived to exist at director level. This perception is nicely illustrated by the anonymous participant who at the first stage of the interviews expressed a strong desire to comply with the strategic thinking of top management (first quotation below). This participant then left the organization, indicating disillusion about directors as one of the main reasons for leaving the organization, as in the second quotation below.

[Passion] to keep the same track with top management thinking is my motivation to develop myself (anonymous participant, stage 1).

Whenever I looked at lives of my directors, they did not look beautiful. [I thought] 'Oh goodness, do I need to reach there? I really don't want to' (anonymous participant, stage 2).

It is probable that the man power [at the level of executives] of my employer is not strong enough. Executives at my employer are the aces of a T group...When you think of company A, there are some well known [star CEO or] executives from the company. [Unlike them, our executives] do not look great (employee 4).

Lack of leadership may be a factor in causing a slowdown, as well as being a result.

The reason why I assume that the lack of business philosophy and business instinct of the current chairman is part of the reason for the growth slowdown is because...To speak without reserve, this is a world where everything is possible with money. [With the money, if he] hires top talents, entrusts them full authority and fires or supports them according to performance, I think, it is quite possible to develop new business (anonymous participant).

Since we haven't seen any success despite continuous endeavour, we tend to lose confidence in ourselves...There has been no one who takes responsibility [for failure in businesses] among our executives (employee 2).

[Because of slowdown of organizational growth] there is no position [for employees] to be promoted to. It is a situation that [I can secure my post as a team manager] only when the current team manager is fired...Thus, team managers just try to avoid risks, not to make any mistakes. [As a result,] innovation disappears (employee 10).

In the interview excerpts above, an anonymous participant explicitly attributed the main responsibility for the growth slowdown to the chairman A. Employee 2 offered the criticism that executives' tendency to avoid responsibility for failures may be symptomatic of general loss of confidence, which may militate against the development of new businesses. Employee 10 criticized middle managers' indifference while explained this in terms of personnel congestion as a result of growth slowdown.

Nostalgia for the past

Nostalgia for 'the good old days' when their employer had achieved rapid growth was widespread among employee and this exacerbates discontent or disillusion with the company.

At that time, the subscriber base was doubled every year...Everyone said our business was like the golden goose...Almost half of revenue was profit, with forty five per cent EBITA margin (employee 9).

My employer was great by the early 2000s. My senior colleagues miss the old days a lot...It was hard to join my employer...pride [as an employee of my employer] was high (employee 1).

Since organizational growth was the central element in sensemaking of employer branding, suspension of rapid growth has become the biggest cause of breach of the psychological contract. Thus, feelings of betrayal over breach of the psychological contract were widespread among employee respondents as illustrated below.

Older workers who have been unable to enjoy the fruits of rapid organizational growth feel unfairly treated. It's because although the company has achieved rapid growth based on their devotion, it treats them now as redundant manpower and tries to kick them out (employee 1).

It has often happened that long-serving colleagues have left the company against their wishes. I felt sorry for them and felt bad about my employer [whenever I saw these situations] (employee 6).

Some tried to dissolve cognitive dissonance as below.

I feel like I'm seeing the worn-out wreck of my father – a man who always looked several times stronger than me and always with a well-stuffed wallet (employee 6).

Before I joined my employer, I used to long to be a part of it ...it looked great, invincible...the way I looked at my father in my childhood, I felt reliable and proud. However, now...I am feeling how much 'he' is struggling. I feel like I have become a robust youngster and he's become elderly. [He is still] lovely since he is my father, my family. However, the love is not respect or envy any more, rather I am feeling responsibility for him that I need to work harder and take care of him as well...I am not saying I'm starting to feel dislike for my employer, what I'm feeling is pity (employee 7).

I feel very frustrated since there is no solution even when I suppose that I were my employer. I know what my employer is doing is the best in the current situation, and that it was decided upon after long thinking. I am saying that I do feel frustrated, yet don't feel mistreated [by my employer]. They are different [feelings] (employee 6).

It is noticeable that employee 6 and 7 used an analogy of an old father in dissolving the cognitive dissonance. In the last quotation, employee 6 acknowledged that his employer was at very least doing its best.

No contribution to national growth

The second sub-category of no contribution to national growth emerged from four first-level sub-categories, (a) firm not contributing to national economic development (b) firm not exporting (c) limitations of telecom service industry

and (d) a dual perspective on being a large company. Table 5.2 presents the first levels of sub-categories and the relevant quotations which support sub-category of no contribution to national growth.

Table 5.2 Data Supporting Sub-category of No Contribution to National Growth

1st level of sub-categories	Representative quotations
<i>Firm not contributing to national economic development</i>	<p>“...questioned how such a big company...could hire so few new employees...while making absolutely no other contribution to the national welfare at all” (employee 8).</p> <p>“Company A today cannot exist without base like T Telecom” (employee 9).</p>
<i>Firm not exporting</i>	<p>“My employer’s Achilles heel is global business” (employee 3).</p> <p>“My employer is trying hard, hoping not to be a hate figure... Although some employees have died [of a controversial industrial disease] in Company A, it is a global company which exports a lot” (employee 2).</p> <p>My dream was to earn ‘petro dollars’ in the 1970s [by working for an organization which is globally active in developing its business] (employee 14).</p>
<i>Limitations of telecom service industry</i>	<p>“No matter how much good we do, it is accepted in a different way from Company A. [In respect to Company A] consumers spend big money once and can see tangible goods afterwards. However, it seems that consumers don’t figure out the value of our contribution, since it is an intangible service” (employee 5).</p> <p>“We don’t have any countermeasure [against the government and people’s attacks on us] other than asking them not to beat us too harshly any more” (employee 12).</p> <p>“[We used to being asked – in a critical way] ‘Which technology do you own?’” (employee 2).</p>
<i>A dual perspective on being a large company</i>	<p>“The first priority [in choosing my employer] was large companies” (employee 8).</p> <p>“It is also important whether people know the company or not, when my parents are talking about the company their son is working for” (employee 5).</p> <p>“There is sorrow and trauma as a person who works for <i>Chaebol</i>” (employee 1).</p>

Firm not contributing to national economic development

The general notion that their employer was not perceived as a contributor to national economic growth was significant among employees.

Since 2003, we have tried to acquire the image of a contributor to the national economy by seriously attempting to do business abroad; all in vain. It's a pity. It seems impossible for my employer to overcome this negative image (employee 5).

The head of Korea Communications Commission, Mr. A, openly questioned how such a big company with yearly revenues of thirteen trillion [eight billion pounds] could hire so few new employees – in the double digits per year – while making absolutely no other contribution to the national welfare at all (employee 8).

Some employees maintained that their employer had contributed to the national economy as the leading telecom company. However, they seemed to be well aware that their self-evaluation of the company's contribution may not be generally accepted.

We have not just achieved simple growth [of our organization] but we have up-scaled [the telecom business of] our country. It was some time ago, so people nowadays usually don't know that our country could become independent in terms of telecoms only since CDMA was commercialized...company A today cannot exist without a base like T Telecom (employee 9).

We don't make a living sucking tax-payers dry [of their hard-earned money]. For our country to be an informational technology power, it is important to be equipped with a well-developed telecom infrastructure. Although it has not been highlighted publicly, we take pride in the company...Although company A or C may have grown larger than us, we think we have also contributed to build the national competitive capability [as much as they have done] (employee 3).

Firm not exporting

Specifically, 'going global', i.e. exporting a lot or doing business abroad on a major scale, was considered as the primary way to contribute to national growth. Nevertheless, employee participants perceived their employer as a representative domestic-business company and this worked as negative factor in their employer branding.

The biggest task for my employer is [going] global (employee 7).

My employer's Achilles heel is global business...Without solving this problem, [my employer] is in a real predicament. [In this sense, my employer's] situation cannot be same as that of company A, B or C (employee 3).

My employer is trying hard, hoping not to be a hate figure... Although some employees have died [of a controversial industrial disease] in company A, it is a global company which exports a lot (employee 2).

As confirmed in the quotations from employee 2 and 3 above, the dichotomy between 'exporting thus contributing to country' and 'non-exporting thus not contributing to country' has been intensified by the unrivalled examples of company A or B, which have achieved status as global top-tier players. That's why these two companies were mentioned often throughout most of interviews with employees and managers of the case company, without prompting by the researcher.

Friends who were interested in working for global companies mostly joined company A or B (employee 7).

Furthermore, my employer is a representative domestic company. Since 2003, we have tried to acquire the image of contributor to the national economy by making a serious attempt to do business abroad; all in vain. It's a pity. It seems impossible for my employer to overcome this negative image. No matter how much company A is criticized, it greatly benefits from the image that it enhances the status of our nation in the world. This kind of image is not possible for us to attain (employee 5).

As employee 5 commented above, the organization had attempted to enter overseas markets without success, and had failed to acquire new growth drivers. As a result, its freedom to try to explore global markets aggressively has become confined, and employees were aware of the situation. This again resulted in a breach of psychological contracts, as illustrated in interview excerpts below.

My dream was to earn 'petro dollars' in the 1970s [by working for an organization which is globally active in developing its business] (employee 14).

As mentioned in the context chapter, Korean construction companies earned big profits in the Middle East in the 1970s, finding ways to overcome the difficulties of operating in barren desert areas. This has become one of the accepted success stories of Korean exporting in the early stages of industrialization. In the quotation above, employee 14 implies that he had judged the organization as highly likely to achieve the same kind of exporting success as the construction companies; hence his decision to join it. But his expectations in this respect had not been met.

The widely-shared notion that domestic-only companies were incompetent had worked as a negative factor in perceptions of the employer brand of the organization. The fact that its business's regional scope was confined to the domestic market was one of the biggest burdens carried by the employer brand, in particular in terms of sensemaking in the popular consciousness. This notion is presented well in the quotations below.

The problem people have with my employer is the fact that it is domestic-only company (employee 3).

We feel upset as employees since people often criticize us without considering the reality that it is not easy for telecom companies to develop markets abroad (employee 13).

There were those who expressed reservations that going global did not always mean personal development, as exemplified in an interview excerpt below; this view seems however not to be widely represented.

I think we need to consider organizational culture, [going] global and personal growth synthetically. Of course, as the employer grows, the stage for employees would become bigger. However, if they are required to just follow what their employer orders, they would become no other than parts of a big machine" (employee 7).

Limitations of telecom service industry

Identity as a member of the leading telecom company worked as a significant issue in employees' perceptions of employer branding.

Employee 5 stated succinctly the distresses he felt as an employee of a telecom service company:

It seems that there are some limitations inherent to the telecom business. [For example,] when we donate big money to charity, people tend to understand it as a case of us demonstrating benevolence with their money... People tend to be sensitive about telecom charges since they pay monthly. No matter how much good we do, it is accepted in a different way from company A. [In respect to company A] consumers spend big money once and can see tangible goods afterwards. However, it seems that consumers don't figure out the value of our contribution, since it is an intangible service...[Our service is] a typical consumer goods which most people pay money for, thus people find it easy to be dissatisfied with us. Furthermore, reduction of telecom charges has been used by pork-barrelling politicians as one of their most common election pledges [thus strengthening the notion that we have made undue profits] (employee 5).

That is, being a telecom company employee could involve distress in that the company functions as (a) a service provider of intangible goods, which are generally understood as less valuable than tangible ones. In particular, as (b) a universal consumer goods provider, i.e. telecom service provider, the organization was susceptible to people's criticism. Finally, as (c) a player in a regulated industry, the organization was affected by the government's policy. Employee 5 seemed to think that these features of the organization applied directly to employees including himself. These three points raised by employee 5 are confirmed in the quotations from other participants below.

Firstly, service companies had been perceived as companies which earned money easily without effort and gorged undue profits in return for insubstantial goods compared with the manufacturing companies which had led the economic development of Korea.

Meanwhile, in November 2011, the T group acquired company F (renamed as company TF afterwards), the second largest DRAM manufacturer in the world, to extend the scope of its business. In respect of the acquisition, some employees said that it compensated some of the feelings of inferiority they experienced towards the manufacturing companies, as illustrated below.

[We] had felt the limitation inherent in not having a manufacturing business but [by the acquisition of company F] this feeling was offset. When I worked in the PR division, I had to put up with hearing journalists comparing my employer with company A all the time, and the first thing they mentioned was always that it is an exporting company and we are domestic company. I feel a lot better about things now [owing to the acquisition of company F]. It is good to have a manufacturing company [as a subsidiary company]. [Laughs] [The fact that we are a service company] is [our] handicap (employee 6, stage 2).

The episode of public criticism about the organization's relatively small intake of new employees exemplified the government's and people's normative assumption that approached the core of business corporations' HR policy, recruitment, from the perspective of contribution to the national economy. Employee 8 seemed to consider this criticism was an unfair one which was based on simple comparison with manufacturing companies. *Korea Communications Commission* is a government-affiliated organization, which is the main regulator of telecom industry.

In fact, my employer has been criticized a lot for this as well. The head of Korea Communications Commission, Mr. A, openly questioned how such a big company with yearly revenues of thirteen trillion [eight billion pounds] could hire so few new employees – in the double digits per year – while making absolutely no other contribution to the national welfare at all. At that time, people at our company were simmering with resentment at this criticism. Anyhow, after that, it is said that the size of my employer's new intake has increased into three-digit, although it is still a little bit more than one hundred. [As the episode shows,] my employer does not meet the requirements of the so called job creation policy of the government (employee 8).

Secondly and thirdly, the notions that their employer provided universal consumer goods and belonged to a regulated industry were very evident in employee's sensemaking of employer branding.

People always talk about telecom charges. They always do. Whatever my employer does, what matters all the time is the telecom charges (employee 2).

There is lots of distress because of the dominant notion that [my employer] feathers its nest by setting high telecom charges...There is no one who considers telecom charges are

cheap enough...Whenever I come across a news article about my employer in the internet, I see thousands of comments tagged on to the item [which are mostly very negative about my employer. Sometimes] I wonder if I am working for a proper company or not (employee 8).

I am acutely aware that my employer belongs to a regulated industry (employee 6).

We don't have any countermeasure [against the government and people's attacks on us] other than asking them not to beat us too harshly any more (employee 12).

In addition, confused identity as a member of a high tech company also influenced employees' perceptions of employer branding. In the past, in the initial stages of the business, mobile telecom companies used to be identified as being at the frontiers of high technology. Some employees were influenced by this image when they decided to enter the organization, as employee 6 said below.

Something hi-tech, that's what it looked like, it paid well and [it was] stable...Telecom business is the flower among IT businesses. It is very rare that any business has more than thirty per cent EBITA margin, other than a telecom business (employee 3).

[Before I joined my employer] I vaguely longed to be in some [business concerning] mobile phones (employee 6).

However, as mobile telecommunication had become widespread, the organization lost this identity and this worked as negative factor in sensemaking of the employer brand.

[We are used to being asked – in a critical way] 'Which technology do you own?' (employee 2).

We haven't done well enough in [doing business in] global [markets] and [procurement of] R&D [capability]. It seems that both of those issues are problems... [In particular, there is a problem regarding self-development of technology, since we are not a manufacturing but a] service company, and such a company normally does not need that. There are different views on the issue, however, and some people maintain that we don't intend to be a technology company like company A anyway (employee 12).

A dual perspective on being a large company

Basically, employee participants seemed to take pride in being part of the largest mobile telecom company in Korea.

Most of all, [we take] pride in being the number one service provider in the telecom industry (employee 13).

[When I joined my employer] I expected there would be opportunity to learn and to contribute as well since it was the no. 1 telecommunication company, in the forefront of the industry and in its way at the cutting edge of business (employee 12).

Similarly, identity as an employee of a large company generally worked positively in sensemaking of the employer brand.

The first priority [in choosing my employer] was large companies. That's because I hope to manage my life with the money I earn and to work with intelligent colleagues (employee 8).

In respect of the reasons for working for large companies, the views or opinions of others were considered important.

It seems that really lots of undergraduates think that joining the company which others have usually heard of before enhances their personal value. Likewise, I was also attracted a lot by the name value of my employer (employee 13).

It is also important whether people know the company or not when my parents are talking about the company their son is working for (employee 5).

Most of my seniors advised me to join a large company (employee 2).

Another reason in favour of working for large companies was suggested in terms of the Korean situation in which competition between large companies on the one hand, and small and medium sized companies on the other, was often not fair.

I have a friend who left my employer and is working for a small company in Silicon Valley at the moment...The reason he is satisfied with working for the small company is because, I guess, he believes in the possibility of [his employer's] success ...However, I think it is not easy for small companies to survive through competition in our country and this is one of the reasons why large companies are favoured as employers [in Korea] (employee 5).

However, a slowdown of the organization's growth had weakened the pride felt as an employee of the leading telecom company.

The experience of failure is very new to us since we have been number 1 all the time (employee 2).

There are some of us who are finding it difficult, since we have always been proud of being part of the top company (employee 9).

In terms of growth my employer's business peaked in the early 2000s...As a result, the leadership position of my employer as a top ICT player has weakened (employee 12).

More fundamentally, understanding employees' perceptions of what it means to be part of a large company seems to require background knowledge of the mixed and contradictory attitudes prevalent in Korea toward large companies. As explained in the research context chapter, large companies were synonymous with the *Chaebol* which was both chain and wings in Korea. In other words, the *Chaebol* have been the object of attack and also of emulation.

Therefore, identity based on membership of one of these large companies in Korea involved mixed feelings of pride and sense of guilt. On the one hand, working for large companies enabled employees to feel pride as contributors to national economic development, while it carried guarantees of higher job security and good pay. (In the case of the organization studied, the image of contributor to the national economy was never fully achieved, thanks both to the growth slowdown of recent years and to inherent features of its business as a telecom company, as illustrated above). On the other hand, since the *Chaebol* were seen by some Koreans as compromised by historic illegalities, employees were not free from feelings of guilt.

These points were clearly reflected in the quotations below.

Working for large company is good. [For example,] job security is secured and lots of benefits, such as convenient access to bank loans etc. are available...It would be not as good as being a professional, but still, employees of large companies would be the best among salaried workers in terms of their social evaluation...However, I wasn't free from people's antipathy against Chaebol (employee 5).

There is sorrow and trauma as a person who works for Chaebol (employee 1).

Induction of the category of growth obsession

As seen above, employees of the organization spoke of growth extensively in regard to their organization's employer branding.

Employees had "a widely-shared doubt about the growth prospects" (employee 13) of their organization and this became the main reason they "[could] not feel pride as a member of" (employee 10) the organization. However, some employees looked at organizational growth slowdown in the light of whether their "interests will be secured" or not (employee 15), thus considered their organization as "still the best in terms of stability" (employee 9). Constant failures in new business initiatives were seen as damaging to pride as a member of a leading organization belonging to "a sector marked by the highest rates of growth" (employee 14) in the past. Perceptions of leadership of the organization were also bound up with organizational growth slowdown.

In addition, employees' notions that their employer did not contribute to national growth showed their high concern for growth at the level of the country. Employees thought that their employer had "the negative image" (employee 5) of a company that had "[made] absolutely no other contribution to the national welfare at all" (employee 8). In particular, its nature as a telecom service company, described as a "typical domestic company" (employee 5), was the "Achilles heel" (employee 3) of the organization. Although employees still took pride in being a part of a large company, and of the "no. 1 telecommunication company which led trends" (employee 12), "there [were] some persons who [felt] difficulties" (employee 9) in accepting the new reality brought about by the recent organizational growth slowdown.

In general, emphasis on growth was so extensive and deep-rooted that it could be described as growth fetishism. In these ways, the category of growth obsession emerged from the data.

Immanent individualism

The second category in employees' sensemaking of the employer brand is immanent individualism. Three sub-categories were identified: Good pay & company welfare, unusual job expectations and horizontal organizational culture.

Table 5.3 Data Supporting Category of Immanent Individualism

Sub-categories	Representative quotations
<i>Good pay & company welfare</i>	<p>"Pay used to be 50% more than that of other companies...There was no question of going to other companies" (employee 9).</p> <p>"However, pay which was top level has become just handsome" (employee 7).</p> <p>"I think all of the benefits are unusual[ly good] and not easy for a business organization to adopt... I don't have any dissatisfaction with my employer" (employee 6).</p>
<i>Unusual job expectations</i>	<p>"[I wanted to join] a company where I might be able to have free time. I expected the situation [in my employer] would be better than in company A or B" (employee 7).</p> <p>"I have had the desired to do different kinds of work" (employee 13).</p>
<i>Horizontal organizational culture</i>	<p>Researcher: What has most impressed you about your employer?</p> <p>Employee 8: The fact that I can report directly to the head of my department...this would be impossible in most other organizations.</p>

Sub-categories

Good pay & company welfare

"An employer that pays well" was one of the main sub-categories in sensemaking of the employer brand of the organization. In particular, the organization had been popular for its competitive pay during its high growth period and its pay was still perceived as competitive. As can be confirmed in the following quotations, good pay had worked as the main attraction for employees to join and stay with the organization.

The biggest factor in joining my employer was pay. My employer paid ten million won [six thousand pounds] more per year than company A (employee 6).

Pay used to be 50% more than that of other companies...There was no question of going to other companies (employee 9).

Similarly, good company welfare had worked as the main factor that made the organization stand out, since employee benefits were unusually generous:

Basically, [my employer's] company welfare is good...[I was always aware that] I could enjoy these benefits owing to my employer (employee 2).

Whenever my colleagues who joined this company at the same time meet together, we share our concerns [about our future careers]. However, when our talk reaches the topic of company welfare, we agree that we're better off staying with this company (employee 13).

[My employer] sent me to the US for continuing education in the 1990s when travelling abroad was not common among Koreans. I felt very proud of my employer and made up my mind to work hard for the company. Recently, I had another opportunity to spend several months on a course in China...I was proud to tell my family because it meant that my wife and children knew that I had worked hard and received these benefits as a return (employee 9).

However, the strength of this competitive pay factor had declined as the telecom market started to be saturated, and lower pay levels started to work as one of the reasons to leave the organization.

However, pay which was top-level has become just handsome. For instance, it is probable that the mobile business division at company A pays more than my employer. It is said that company G and even obscure companies such as company H pay sixty million won [thirty seven thousand pounds] per year, let alone company B (employee 7).

In deciding on leaving the company, the relatively less competitive pay was a factor, with maybe 40~50 per cent importance (anonymous participant, stage 2).

Receiving good pay was a matter of survival and pride at the same time. For example, employee 9 seemed to approach good pay primarily as a matter of

survival, see the quotation below. By contrast, it seemed to be a matter of pride for employee 7 who felt uneasiness seeing company G, which was less known than its subsidiary, company B, and even the ‘obscure’ company H, a fellow subsidiary of company B, paid similar amount to their employees, as emerged in the quotation above.

Since joining my employer, [our family] could live well thanks to good pay and company welfare. If I could stay with my employer until I finish paying my youngest child’s university expenses, then I would be able to say that my life as a salaried worker has been successful (employee 9).

Whereas pay had become less competitive due to organizational growth slowdown, company welfare was seen to have been further extended. The organization had introduced various benefits and continuing education programs as an attempt to foster personal growth after it established the new corporate vision. Employees were aware of this, as the quotations below show.

Our employer does a lot to promote continuing education for employees. Lots of supportive measures have been taken in terms of HR policy. Junior employees can even use unused benefits of other colleagues in the same team. I think I have benefited a lot. I am studying finance, using the program, at the moment (employee 7, stage 2).

Various new systems, like flexible working hours and six month sabbatical leave were introduced. Opportunities for MBA studies overseas, and financial support for personal education were extended (employee 1, stage 2).

However, as the quotations below show, there was no unanimity among employees as to how decisions by the employer to extend company welfare were to be understood. Whereas employee 6 understood these as indicative of the organization’s good will, employee 1 saw them as a last resort to appease dissatisfied employees.

I can see how much [my employer] is trying its best. [Although the company is no longer showing rapid growth,] my employer is making good money from the existent main business and it is investing the money in its employees...I think all of the benefits are unusual[ly good] and not easy for any business organization to adopt. [For example,] how can my employer introduce unpaid

leave? If some employees leave to pursue study, it would be a good chance to fire them on the quiet, but my employer has a policy of undertaking to keep their posts open for them when they finish their study. I don't have any dissatisfaction with my employer (employee 6, stage 2).

My employer probably sees the situation as critical and feels under pressure to try something, in view of the recent eruption of employee discontent (employee 1, stage 2).

Unusual job expectations

In respect to work, data on (a) unusual job expectations (b) compatibility of work and (c) work/life balance were suggested in interviews with employees.

Firstly, some employees had strong desires for different kinds of work. However, this expectation had not been met all the time as illustrated below.

I wanted to join T Telecom. It was like, well, I thought I could do different kinds of work [here] (employee 8).

I have had the desire to do different kinds of work (employee 13).

Honestly speaking, there is no sign of forward-looking job design in this company since most work areas are related to the voice telecommunication business in domestic market...Most jobs can be done by persons who just graduated high school (employee 1).

Again, organizational growth was suggested as prerequisite for unusual job expectations to be available in an organization.

[In the past] when the business of my employer expanded, lots of opportunities were provided...there was no hesitation in trying new businesses. The situation was particularly appealing to young employees. If you planned and presented an idea, it was realized. I have seen stories straight out of a soap opera coming true, time after time, with my own eyes in this company (employee 6).

Secondly, compatibility of work was also important to employees.

Researcher: What did you mainly consider when you decided to join this company?

Employee 2: Whether I could manage the job and show my ability through the work.

Lastly, work/life balance was important.

I wanted to live like a decent man. I joined my employer since I heard that it is a good company (employee 8).

[I would like to join] a company where I may be able to have free time. I expected the situation [in my employer] would be better than in company A or B (employee 7).

I have a desire for [a decent] family life, so when I have my babies, I would like to raise them myself and have considerable time with them (employee 13).

Nevertheless, some employees argued that work/life balance was relatively less valued, as compared with the West and explained the reason as below (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010).

Korean society has its requirements...if somebody does not like the requirements, then he or she does not fit into this country. There are some friends of mine preparing for emigration [because they cannot or don't want to meet these requirements]. I don't think there is a huge difference whether he or she is working for company A, B or T Telecom since they are all large companies in Korea...I think Korean society requires extremely high levels of loyalty (employee 11).

If employees in Europe and the US consider work life balance as 1:1, I guess we do 7:1 or even 11:—1...Most importantly, the notion that success in the society outweighs harmony in the family is at the bottom. We often use an expression like 'this is a company to which I devoted my 20's and 30's' but not 'this is a lady to whom I devoted my 20's and 30's'...We have so many things that we are anxious to achieve through our employer...This situation will continue as long as the nation Korea and its culture are not totally changed (employee 14).

Horizontal organizational culture

Horizontal organizational culture was one of the main sub-categories which differentiated the organization against most other Korean organizations and acted as an important element in sensemaking of the employer brand.

Representative images of employees of the organization were 'young male and

female employees working in fashionable casual wear and voicing their own opinion in front of superiors without hesitation'. This image represented the relationship-oriented or feminine organizational culture of the organization, which was distinct from the performance-oriented or masculine organizational culture of most other Korean companies.

As illustrated below, this caused one employee to evaluate the organization as flexible in its thinking (employee 13), while for another it was simply the company's most impressive quality (employee 8).

As very simple examples, the dress code at my work is business casual, all rank and file employees have the same title of 'manager' [before we become team managers] and various systems such as flexi-time are being operated...Generally, my employer has flexible way of thinking (employee 13).

Researcher: What has most impressed you about your employer?

Employee 8: The fact that I can report directly to the head of my department...this would be impossible in most other organizations.

Also the horizontal organizational culture provided the motivation to join the organization (employee 13) or the main reason to stay with it (employee 15).

I really hate hierarchical organization and always hoped to work for organization with a free atmosphere. Also I want to voice my opinion and affect the organization's decisions. Early experience with my employer led me to believe I could realize these hopes here (employee 13).

Whenever [my colleagues] consider leaving my employer because of the lack of growth, I advise them that all employers are basically the same. I think this company is a really good place to work. At least, we can speak our minds in front of our team managers (employee 15).

The horizontal organizational culture seemed to be reflected in human relationships at work, and relationships with immediate superiors in particular.

I have no complaint about my work life. Above all, I am quite satisfied with the atmosphere of my team and [attitude of] the team manager. It is generally true that junior employees need to do face reading and tend to feel the burden [of a hierarchical atmosphere] at work. However, [I feel] respected and relaxed in

our team...I think my team is the best. Actually, I am not interested in getting transferred to other teams. I feel like I can [happily] work in the same team for my whole life (employee 7).

I never thought that working could be enjoyable...I guess [it's because] I can work well with the new team manager. He is giving me more control over my work (employee 2).

Induction of category of immanent individualism

As seen above, employees persisted in introducing individualistic issues in the context of employer branding, although that tendency was weaker than in the case of the first category, the obsession with organizational growth.

Good pay was “the biggest factor in joining” (employee 6) and it was also a factor in not “going to other companies” (employee 9); in a similar vein, the company welfare of the organization provided reasons to “stay with this company” (employee 13). Also, employees had an expectation that they could do “different kinds of work” (employee 8 and 13) in the organization. Most of all, employees valued the fact that they could “voice [their] opinion” (employee 8, 13 and 15) in an environment where a “flexible way of thinking” (employee 13) was possible.

Conclusion of findings 1

Finding 1 explains employer branding in terms of employees' sensemaking. On the one hand, concerns about organizational growth slowdown were significant. Most employees understood organizational growth slowdown as damaging their pride whereas some of them approached it as no more than an issue of job security. Failures in developing new businesses and reminiscence about high organizational growth in the past also emerged as main issues in their perceptions of employer branding. These concerns flowed into the organizational growth slowdown sub-category. Another sub-category of no contribution to national growth was also evident and it found specific expression in employees' perceptions of their organization as a non-exporting telecom service company. These two sub-categories, organizational growth slowdown and no contribution to national growth, contribute to and together constitute the first main category, growth obsession.

On the other hand, immanent individualism was inducted as the second category in employees' sensemaking of employer branding from sub-categories of good pay and company welfare, unusual job expectations and horizontal organizational culture.

To sum up, employees of the organization understood employer branding of their organization primarily with reference to growth obsession and immanent individualism.

Findings 2

Research Question 2. Which actors are the most influential in the employees' perceptions of employer branding? & Why?

Societal influence on perceptions of employer branding

My data show that the employees' perceptions of employer branding illustrated in **Findings 1** are primarily influenced by factors operating at the societal level. These findings are novel since the linkage of analyses at the micro and the macro levels has not been a topic featuring in existing employer branding literature.

Regarding growth obsession

The significant influence of societal level on perceptions in respect to growth obsession was confirmed on the basis of three grounds. Firstly, the contents of perceptions were found to converge with those of societal values, ideologies of the state in particular. Secondly, employees themselves recognized their perceptions as outcomes of societal influence. Finally, the great importance of construed external images with "people" as audience in employees' perceptions suggested the societal influence.

Convergence of contents

The contents of employees' sensemaking of employer branding in regard to growth obsession have converged with societal values in Korea. In particular, they are significantly similar with the contents of ideologies spread by the developmental state in the past, i.e. nationalism and developmentalism. In the following section, data showing the overlap with societal values are illustrated.

Firstly, employees' emphasis on organizational growth and the tendency to appreciate it in terms of contribution to the country are in line with developmentalism, which views organizational growth as means for national development.

Suppose Korea is a society having 100, I believed that it is the businessmen who are going to increase it to 120 (employee 14).

I am not sure if a society can be maintained only when growth is sustained or not...(employee 8).

We have not just achieved simple growth [of our organization] but up-scaled [the telecom business of] our country (employee 9).

As illustrated in interview excerpts above, employee 14 told us that he had bought into the view of the role of business organizations as agents of national wealth. Employee 8's response shows that he has reflected on the link between growth and the continued existence of society. Employee 9 seemed to believe that his employer's growth and achievement had greater meaning when they were understood in terms of contribution to the country. These are all overlapped with developmentalism.

Secondly, a dichotomous way of thinking that exporting companies were competent and made a contribution to the nation whereas companies with a domestic-only business scope were incompetent seems to be closely aligned with developmentalism in Korea, which followed an export-oriented strategy. The quotations below show similar notions.

Furthermore, my employer is a typical domestic company. Since 2003, we have tried to acquire the image of a contributor to the national economy by seriously attempting to do business abroad; all in vain. It's a pity. It seems impossible for my employer to overcome this negative image. No matter how much company A is criticized, it greatly benefits from the image that it enhances the status of our nation in the world. This kind of image is not possible for us to attain to (employee 5).

My employer is trying hard, hoping not to be a hate figure... Although some employees have died [of a controversial industrial disease] in company A, it is a global company which exports a lot (employee 2).

My employer's Achilles heel is global business...Without solving this problem, [my employer] is in a real predicament. [In this sense, my employer's] situation cannot be same as that of company A, B or C (employee 3).

As the excerpt above illustrated, employee 5 thought that a “domestic company” cannot “acquire the image of a contributor to national economy” before it “do [es] business abroad”. Employees seemed to accept as an irresistible reality that the status of the domestic-only business was decisively inferior to that of global companies such as company A, B or C. They perceived the difference as so powerful as to neutralize the effect of controversial issues about company A, including alleged occupational deaths.

As appears below, employee 6 perceived that his employer had been considered inferior to company A just because it was a domestic company. He did not oppose the idea that having domestic-only business scope was “handicap”, particularly in the eyes of one influential group of stakeholders, journalists. This employee’s response also illustrates another kind of dichotomous thinking which harks back to developmentalism: the opposition of service and manufacturing industry

[We] had felt limitation inherent in not having a manufacturing business but [by the acquisition of company F] this feeling was offset. When I worked in the PR division, I had to put up with hearing journalists comparing my employer with company A all the time, and the first thing they mentioned was always that it is an exporting company and we are domestic company. I feel a lot better about things now [owing to the acquisition of company F]. It is good to have a manufacturing company [as a subsidiary company]. [Laughs] [The fact that we are a service company] is [our] handicap (employee 6, stage 2).

Individuals’ self-recognition of societal influence

The second ground of societal influence on employees’ perceptions of employer branding is their own recognition of societal influence. Self analysis of the phenomena was provided as follows:

[This is] required by Korean society...It is Korea that knows best how sweet the fruit of growth is (employee 8).

Korean society has its requirements...if somebody does not like the requirements, then he or she does not fit into this country.

There are some friends of mine preparing for emigration [because they cannot or don't want to meet these requirements]. I don't think there is a huge difference whether he or she is working for company A, B or T Telecom since they are all large companies in Korea ...I think Korean society requires extremely high levels of loyalty (employee 11).

Employee 8 and employee 11 perceived the high interest on organizational growth as “Korean society’s requirements”, which cannot be avoided unless by emigration to other countries. It is also noteworthy that employee 8 explained the growth obsession in terms of collective memory.

In similar vein, employee 3 explained employees’ obsession about their employer’s going global by explicit reference to the notion of societal influence as below.

I think it is a matter of Korean identity. Our country could not have survived without its drive outwards, beyond its borders. Thus, no matter how successful a company is in the domestic market, it cannot be free from the political agenda [i.e. the necessity of going global], [otherwise] it is like one of these asocial lone-wolf heroes who cannot be understood in Korean sentiment at all(employee 3).

As can be seen in the quotation from employee 1 below, a notion was established that the relationship between employer and employees was not just dyadic but societal.

I think issues like satisfaction with one’s employer should be seen from the perspective of the overall social system rather than as a simple relationship between the employer and me (employee 1).

The influence of construed external image

The construed external image of the company was very powerful and was in most cases accepted more whole-heartedly than what employees themselves actually perceived and thought about their own employer. The concept of construed external image, which refers to “a member’s beliefs about outsiders’ perceptions of the organization”, allows us to observe how much they were

influenced by the audience outside of their organization (Dutton et al., 1994: 248).

We don't make a living sucking tax-payers dry [of their hard-earned money]. For our country to be an informational technology power, it is important to be equipped with a well developed telecom infrastructure. Although it has not been highlighted publicly, we take pride in the company...Although company A or C have grown larger than us, we think we have also contributed to build the national competitive capability [as much as they have done] (employee 3).

What is very unfair is that, although we are a leading company in the telecom industry of our country, people consider us a rogue enterprise and the government attempts to lower telecom charges without any reasonable justification. We have a big sense of grievance [about the way the company is treated by society in general and the government] (employee 1).

There is lots of distress because of the dominant notion that [my employer] feathers its nest by imposing high telecom charges...it crossed my mind to leave this company for this very reason ...There is no one who considers telecom charges are cheap enough...Although I was aware of this already, I didn't know how serious it was. It seems that the situation is getting worse. Junior employees want to work for companies that people feel positive about...Whenever I come across a news article about my employer in the internet, I see thousands of comments tagged on to the item [,mostly very negative about my employer. Sometimes] I wonder if I am working for proper company or not (employee 8).

As comes across in the interview excerpts above, employee 3 thought that his employer had contributed as much to the country as company A or C had done, through developing the telecom infrastructure, and felt proud of this. Employee 1 also seemed to be proud of being part of the leading telecom company. However, they were aware that the organization was seen as “a rogue enterprise” (employee 1) that “feather[ed] its nest” (employee 8) by “sucking tax-payers dry” (employee 3). Despite this pride, they felt so outraged and distressed by the construed external image that employee 8 admits to wondering whether his organization was “a proper company” and to having considered leaving it.

The fact that its business was in its regional scope confined to the domestic market was one of the biggest problems for employees in their sensemaking of

the employer brand. Again, the construed image was influential, as confirmed in the quotations below.

What people criticize about my employer is the fact that it is a domestic-only company (employee 3).

We feel upset as employees since people often criticize us without considering the realities – that it is not easy for telecom companies to develop markets abroad (employee 13).

Regarding immanent individualism

The societal influence on employees' perceptions of employer branding in regard to immanent individualism was also observable in the thesis data.

Employee participants perceived the horizontal organizational practices of the organization as rational, and this was in line with societal values in Korea, which considered Western practices as 'rational' (Jang & Chung, 1997 cited in Lee, 1998). Although there was some difference among employees in the degree to which they perceived their organization as putting 'rational' practices into action in reality, as can be observed in the quotations below, they linked horizontal practices with rationality.

Our society has been changing in the direction of greater rationality ...the T group is relatively rational [compared with other companies], I think... Anyway, most people [in my organization] accept what is reasonable...at least they are trying to (employee 11).

Since we are all called managers [regardless of seniority], we have the same level of right to speak in meetings. This is rational (employee 5).

Although my employer has a fairly rational image, this is not always how things appear to insiders (employee 1).

These aspects were generally considered as advanced practices or culture in Korean society, and employees were aware of this evaluation.

Whenever I meet my friends who work for other companies they are surprised to see my casual clothing and say 'do you really go

to your work in these clothes? I envy you. It's true what they say, T Telecom is different' (employee 7).

Roles of societal actors

The influence of societal level on employees' perceptions of employer branding can be analyzed according to which specific societal actors have been influential. The state was clearly the most influential although religion and family were also important.

The state

The influence of the state in terms of employees' growth obsession regarding employer branding was the most evident among major societal actors.

Korean society has its requirements...if somebody does not like the requirements, then he or she does not fit into this country. There are some friends of mine preparing for emigration [because they cannot or don't want to meet these requirements]. I don't think there is a huge difference whether he or she is working for company A, B or T Telecom since they are all large companies in Korea...I think Korean society requires extremely high levels of loyalty (employee 11).

[This is] required by Korean society...It is Korea that knows best how sweet the fruit of growth is (employee 8).

The notion that 'the emphasis on organizational growth came from Korean society' was expressed often in interviews with employee participants as above. The expectation from society was so strong, as employee 11 perceived that people did not have any other option than accepting or leaving Korea.

In the quotations below, employee 3 explained the idea that an organization should contribute to a country by exporting a lot, as a matter of national identity. Employee 14 also explained the different work/life balance in terms of national culture and employee 1 was similar in understanding the employment relationship within the frame of the societal value system.

I think it is a matter of Korean identity. Our country could not have survived without being prepared to move out into the

world. Thus, no matter how successful a company is in domestic market, it cannot be free from the political agenda [i.e. the necessity of going global],[otherwise] it is like one of these asocial lone-wolf heroes who cannot be understood in Korean sentiment at all(employee 3).

If employees in Europe and the US consider work life balance as 1:1, I guess we do 7:1 or even 11:—1...Most importantly, the notion that success in the society outweighs harmony in family is at the bottom. We often use an expression like ‘this is a company to which I devoted my 20’s and 30’s’ but not ‘this is a lady to whom I devoted my 20’s and 30’s’...We have so many things that we are anxious to achieve through our employer...This situation will continue as long as the nation Korea and its culture are not totally changed (employee 14).

I think issues like satisfaction with one’s employer should be seen from the perspective of the overall social system rather than as a simple relationship between the employer and me (employee 1).

Religion and the family

The growth obsession can be understood in terms of religion, i.e. Confucianism. In this respect, another societal actor, i.e. the family, cannot be irrelevant, since it plays a role as the basis for all relationship in Confucianism.

It would be enough to educate children moderately and let them make a living moderately yet [Korean parents] spare no effort to send them to the best University...Success in society is very important in Korea. We study to rise in the world. I think this is something deep rooted. Our study, everyday life etc. are all focused on recognition in society (employee 14).

In the quotation above, the notion current in Confucianism of ‘rising in the world and gaining fame’ is clearly reflected.

In the following interview excerpts, another feature of Confucianism, the notion of face-saving, was illustrated.

It is also important whether people know the company or not when my parents are talking about the company their son is working for (employee 5).

It seems that really lots of undergraduates think that joining the company which others have usually heard of before enhances their personal value. Likewise, I was also attracted a lot by the name value of my employer (employee 13).

In regard to both notions, it is possible to observe the involvement of another societal actor, i.e. the family.

When employees attempted to dissolve psychological dissonance issuing from organizational growth slowdown, some of them drew upon another Confucian resource, namely paternalism:

I feel like I'm seeing the worn-out wreck of my father – a man who always looked several times stronger than me and always with a well-stuffed wallet (employee 6).

Before I joined my employer, I used to long to be a part of it...it looked great, invincible...the way I looked at my father in my childhood, I felt reliable and proud. However, now...I am feeling how much 'he' is struggling. I feel like I have become robust youngster and he's become elderly. [He is still] lovely since he is my father, my family. However, the love is not respect or envy any more, rather I am feeling responsibility for him that I need to work harder and take care of him as well...I am not saying I start to dislike my employer, what I'm feeling is pity (employee 7).

Conclusion of findings 2

According to the second set of findings, growth obsession and immanent individualism, which have emerged as the two main categories in employees' sensemaking of employer branding, appeared to be influenced by values at the societal level. Convergence of contents, individuals' self-recognition of societal influence and the significance of construed external image were adduced as evidence which supports societal influence on growth obsession among employees. In regard to societal influence on individualism, the assumption current among employees that horizontal organizational practices can be seen as rational was in line with societal values in Korea. The state was the most influential among major societal actors along with religion and the family.

Findings 3

Research Question 3. How does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver?

Organizational embeddedness and agency

Research question 3 concerns the embeddedness and agency of the organization. My data showed that the status of the employer in the discourse of employer branding can be evaluated as secondary since its role appears to be limited to accepting social demands for defensive purposes.

In the following section, this was firstly observable in terms of embeddedness, which was suggested in (a) embeddedness of organizational propositions and practices (b) embeddedness perceptions from employees' perspective and (c) great influence of construed external image among managers. After that, consideration is given to the (limited) extent to which the organization showed agency.

Embeddedness

The extent of embeddedness of the organization into societal influences was confirmed in terms of both of the employer's own perspective and the employees' embeddedness perceptions. Embeddedness indicates that organizations are constrained by a social and normative context (Oliver, 1996).

Embeddedness of organizational propositions and practices

Firstly, embeddedness of the organization was evident in terms of its corporate vision and projected employer brand. As mentioned in the research context chapter, in March 2012, which was between the first and second stages of interviews, the organization overhauled its corporate vision, using the slogan 'Partner for new possibilities' (T Telecom website, 2014). The new vision was accepted as a more growth oriented one, as evident in the accompanying target known as '100 & 100', which aimed to achieve a corporate value of a hundred

trillion won (6.6 trillion pounds) and to be included among the hundred largest global brands by 2020.

Managers of the organization explained the revised corporate vision in terms of responding to social demands, as in the interview excerpt below.

The essence of [the new corporate vision] ultimately lies in organizational growth [and it includes values] which are surely required by the times such as responding to change and innovating (Brand manager 2, stage 2).

The new vision seemed to confirm the embeddedness of the organization into societal values in another aspect as well. As explained above, the second ‘100’ of the new corporate goal ‘100 & 100’ indicated its global vision to become one of the hundred largest global brands by 2020. This emphasized adherence to the global market orientation despite the company’s historical failures in exploring world markets.

However, interestingly, the official moves of the organization seemed to be divergent from what the organization emphasized in reality. The gap is apparent in an interview excerpt below, where a manager admitted to a lack of enthusiasm in the organization’s attitude to the overseas market:

Although it is correct that we aim for global [market], we don’t stress it that much (HR manager 3, stage 1).

Considering what appears to be the open admission, by a representative of management, that their organization would not try to explore overseas markets as aggressively as before, the maintenance of a global vision would seem to be more or less the outcome of superficial acceptance of societal values. The point is reinforced in terms of employees’ perceptions of embeddedness in the next section.

The embeddedness of the organization was confirmed regarding employer branding as well. The organization’s projected employer brand was ‘global company and specialist’ at the first stage of interviews, and it had been revised into ‘partner for employees’ personal growth’ by the time of the second stage of

interviews (T Telecom HR policy document, 2012). Each of these slogans concurred with societal values (while highlighting in each case a different set of targets). In the process, employer played a role as the secondary actor who accepted social requirements on employer branding rather than the primary actor who decided upon a targeted image of employer branding and contrived to achieve this.

In particular, the data of the thesis acquired from two stages of fieldwork sharply reveal the embeddedness of the organization. As presented in the first quotation below, HR manager 1 originally favoured a differentiation-oriented approach to employer branding, highlighting its organizational culture at the first stage of interview. However, the organization adopted a legitimacy-oriented strategy in reality and he explained its inevitability at the second stage of interview (in the second quotation below).

What we would like to appeal [to prospective employees] is neither vision nor pay but organizational culture (HR manager 1, stage 1).

Researcher: Your company has overhauled HR policy and the directions of organizational culture to accompany the new corporate vision. What are the reasons for your company to attempt to change these cultural directions into performance oriented ones?

HR Manager 1: It is required to emphasize the prospect of growth...we thought that 'Vision 2020' cannot be achieved with the existing way of thinking and doing jobs and systems in our company (stage 2).

Embeddedness perceptions from the employees' perspective

Embeddedness of the organization was suggested in terms of employees' perceptions as well. In other words, employees understood many aspects of employer branding of their organization as outcomes of the embeddedness of the organization into societal values.

For example, despite the employer's ambiguous attitude towards going global as presented above, employees accepted this as a matter of their employer's embeddedness into societal values, which attached significance to advancement in global markets. This is observable in the quotation below.

Researcher: However, going global is still included in the new vision?

Employee 6: Getting rid of it would be seen as rather an unusual pledge (stage 2).

In addition, employees understood their organization's manpower planning policy in terms of meeting social demands as below.

My employer recruits about a hundred new employees a year. This is mainly to do with social responsibility rather than purely due to needs of my organization (employee 9).

What is noteworthy is that these embeddedness perceptions did not automatically make the organization's strategies more effective or translate them into reality. This is interesting particularly when considering the second finding of the current thesis, that employees themselves were significantly influenced by societal values.

For example, although most employees perceived their employer's new vision as embedded in societal values, most of employees were indifferent or even cynical towards the new vision. These attitudes can be partially confirmed by the fact that the new vision was not mentioned at all in any of the interviews with employees at the second stage before the researcher put a direct question about it. So, these quotations below are participants' reply to my question in the latter part of each interview. I asked them, "your employer announced the new corporate vision last year. What's your opinion about it?"

The new vision? I haven't thought of the vision deeply. Honestly, I feel it a bit remote from me (employee 6, stage 2).

Who on earth sympathizes with the vision? (employee 10, stage 2).

To speak a bit negatively, it seems that they change corporate vision whenever a new CEO comes along (employee 4, stage 2).

HR manager 2 acknowledged the limited success of the new vision in appealing to employees and he found the cause in typical features of the telecom service industry, and more fundamentally in the growth slowdown experienced by the

organization; this argument was reinforced by a comparison with Google, which is also a service company, yet growing.

[I acknowledge that] there are still blurred aspects in the new corporate vision. I think the vagueness is inescapable when you are planning in the service industry, which deals with intangible goods, and this is particularly the case in telecom industry since its market has saturated...There is a critical difference with Google since it is still growing [and our company is not] (HR manager 2, stage 2).

The influence of construed external image among managers

In arguing for societal influence on employees' growth obsession, the strong influence of a construed external image has been considered above. Managers who were in charge of employer branding also seemed to be significantly influenced by construed external image, just as employees were. They reflected very often during the interviews on the fact that the organization had somehow acquired a bad reputation, as presented below.

Large companies are no other than the axis of evil [to Korean people]. They may like our products but they don't support businessmen or the companies themselves. I am not positive about the possibility of a change in their attitude...The government uses us when we are useful, but it also imputes its own faults to us and likes nothing better than an anti-business witch-hunt (CSR manager).

Rather than feeling grateful for our help, most NGOs behave as if they are saying 'We will use the money you earned in dirty ways for good purposes' (CSR manager).

As illustrated above interview excerpts, managers of the company perceived that people considered their organization as "the axis of evil" (CSR manager) that "earned (money) in dirty ways" (CSR manager). They also thought that their organization can become the object of a "witch-hunt" (CSR manager) by the government.

Even managers themselves sometimes "feel like criminals" (Brand manager 2) and "ashamed of working for" the organization (Brand manager 2), as presented in the quotations below.

[Sometimes] we feel like criminals just because we are working for a large company (Brand manager 2).

When I chat with my relatives or friends, I sometimes feel ashamed of working for T Telecom, or become upset. I don't know how to explain myself, don't know where to start (Brand manager 2).

Brand manager 2 understood the reasons behind the negative construed external image in terms of (a) features of their service as a universal consumer good and (b) the company's domestic-only business scope, as in the quotation below.

The situation in which [people] may feel dissatisfied with us is one which is more and more prevalent: In the past, mobile communication was the exclusive property of a limited number of [rich] persons who would boast about it. Nowadays, even small children are using it. In addition, people often haven't heard that we export anything abroad...It may seem that we don't contribute to the national interest (Brand manager 2).

However, this reflective tendency seemed to be stronger among managers who were in charge of branding or CSR, who were concerned directly with external audiences, rather than HR managers. The difference seems to show a 'conservative' attitude in those responsible for HR in the organization (i.e. confining their scope to internal audiences). This point is developed further in the later section.

Agency

Organization's agency

Agency refers to the actor's "capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts [, by] reinterpret[ing] and mobiliz[ing] an array of resources" (Sewell, 1992: 19). The main agentive capacity of the organization seems to be its ability to build up horizontal organizational culture.

*Researcher: What has most impressed you about your employer?
Employee 8: The fact that I can report directly to the head of my department...this would be impossible in most*

other organizations.

I really hate hierarchical organization and I always hoped to work in an organization with a free atmosphere. Also I want to voice my opinion and affect the organization's decisions. Early experience with my employer led me to believe I could realize these hopes here (employee 13).

There was some difference of opinion regarding the employer's motivation to implement horizontal organizational practices, as evidenced below.

My employer probably sees the situation as critical and feels under pressure to try something, in view of the recent eruption of employee discontent (employee 1).

I can see how much [my employer] is trying its best. [Although the company is no longer showing rapid growth,] my employer is making good money from the existent main business and it is investing the money in its employees...I think all of the benefits are unusual[ly good] and not easy for any business organization to adopt. [For example,] how can my employer introduce unpaid leave? If some employees leave to pursue study, it would be a good chance to fire them on the quiet, but my employer has a policy of undertaking to keep their posts open for them when they finish their study. I don't have any dissatisfaction with my employer (employee 6).

However, most employees seemed to agree that the organization implemented unusual horizontal organizational practices as illustrated below.

Various new systems, like flexible working hours and six month sabbatical leave were introduced. Opportunities for MBA studies overseas, and financial support for personal education were extended (employee 1).

Our employer is a keen supporter of continuing education. Lots of supportive measures have been taken in terms of HR policy. Junior employees even can use unused benefits of other colleagues in the same team. I think I have benefited a lot. I am studying finance using the program at the moment (employee 7).

As very simple examples, the dress code at my work is business casual, all rank and file employees have the same title of 'manager' [before we become team managers] and various systems such as flexi-time are being operated...Generally, my employer has flexible way of thinking (employee 13).

Limitations in organization's agency

Some employees suggested that the organization needed to be growing strongly in order to secure a strong position in the discourse of employer branding:

When the employer is performing well, every story it puts out touches the employees' hearts! By contrast, when it isn't doing so well, the employees just laugh at the press releases. When you come right down to it, the most important thing is growth (General manager).

I think the image which my employer is attempting to project, 'Mobile enabler', is the right choice...However, what is important is [not which image it is trying to project but], as an obvious example, why we didn't develop [new businesses like] 'KakaoTalk' (employee 14).

The interview excerpt of the general manager above also reflects the dynamic and fluid nature of employer branding. Employee 14 argued the importance of organizational growth in organization's sensegiving through the comparison with KakaoTalk, a mobile messenger service which was one of the most successful businesses in the recent history of the mobile telecom market in Korea.

Limitation in the organization's agency was confirmed by the fact that employees' perceptions of horizontal organizational culture, which was the outcome of this agency, became negative as the growth of the organization slowed down.

For example, some employees denied the very existence or efficacy of organizational culture. They evaluated relationship-oriented practices as the result of the rapid growth rather than as a reflection of any deep-rooted organizational culture. In other words, the way they saw it, the reason the organization could afford to have a culture less fixated on performance was just that its performance was not – for the moment – a key problem: crumbs from the rich man's table, one might say. These points are presented below.

I don't think companies in Korea are interested in organizational culture...They seem to not to think about it...Do you see any efforts to take it seriously? Has anybody tried to make it better? (employee 4)

It is early to conclude that this is our organizational culture...I think that whether we are earning good money or not is the more influential factor [than organizational culture]. Could we maintain a warm culture if we were suffering from 'hunger' at the moment? (employee 6).

In addition, as growth ebbed away, negative aspects of horizontal organizational culture were noticed.

[In our company,] there are many people who do not like others to work hard. In company A, employees who do a good job and achieve high performance are promoted [but it is not the case at my employer] (employee 10).

It seems that there is no one who takes responsibility [for business failure]. If this were company A, some people would already be fired. [Yet] it seems that things are just going on [as if nothing happened here in my employer despite constant failures] (employee 4).

My employer still tends to be generous in dealing with business failure. This is good for me [since I have a failure in overseas business behind me]. However, I don't think it is good (employee 6).

In particular, some employees ascribed the cause of the growth slowdown to the horizontal culture. That is, the organization was perceived as being unprepared to mete out both rewards and punishments in appropriate cases, and horizontal organizational culture was considered as one of the background elements of the problem. This is illustrated in the quotations below.

There are lots of differences with company A...The core of that company lies in the principle of 'dispensation of justice both to services and crimes'. That means there is no concept of the second chance. Good performers are fully supported and bad performers are kicked out [in company A...Unlike company A,] one of our core values is love. You could argue that for a business organization to cherish such values shows a sort of disconnect...However, I think this aspect is not bad (employee 11).

Our organizational culture or atmosphere could be evaluated as flexible, but it's no way to run a business. In company A, they dump a business right after it is revealed to be unsuccessful and this would be the same in company B. Leave aside the question whether this sort of organizational culture is desirable or

not...In my company, we close out a line of business after covering up as if it was successful...In this culture, there is no distinction between winners and losers. We could see very often people who have failed in several businesses ride higher than others. Paternalism rather than performance oriented values is prevalent in my company...Definitely there are some problems (employee 14).

As observable above, company A and B were often mentioned as exemplar companies where the principle of reward and punishment operates and performance is duly achieved based on this culture.

Factors bearing upon the organization's embeddedness and agency

The organization's embeddedness and agency can be explained in terms of external and internal organization factors.

External factors

Higher demands of legitimacy

The employer seemed to approach branding strategy including employer branding as an instrument for legitimacy rather than differentiation, and this phenomenon seemed to arise out of differential levels of societal demands for legitimacy and differentiation. That is, whereas societal demands for legitimacy were strong, demands for differentiation were not that high.

The big goal [of corporate branding,] that we should make our company as respected and loved possible, is already given (Brand manager 2).

If it is a Korean company, it should be respected and loved by our people (Brand manager 2).

Everything plays into the social atmosphere and affects how people perceive business corporations (Brand manager 2).

The essence of [the new corporate vision] ultimately lies in organizational growth [and it includes values] which are surely required by the times, such as responding to change and innovating (Brand manager 2).

The legitimacy-oriented approach was also found in respect to employer branding.

We'd like to stress that employees [who join our company] will feel pride in contributing to industrial and societal development as well as personal satisfaction (HR manager 1).

The legitimacy-oriented approach was confirmed in the documents produced by the organization in regard to recruitment. As can be seen in the press releases below, T Telecom has highlighted its efforts as an equal opportunity recruiter of prospective employees with a local university certificate or a high school diploma.

T Telecom has announced that the ratio of new employees with a local university certificate was more than 30 per cent of the gonchae (the annual or biannual large scale open-recruitment system) for the second half of 2011 (T Telecom press release, 5th September, 2011).

By continuously extending recruitment of new employees with a local university certificate since 2011, T Telecom intends to address its social responsibility in the area of employment extension and provision of equal opportunity (T Telecom press release, 21st March, 2012).

This is highly significant in the context of meeting T Telecom's social responsibility to extend the employment of prospective employees with a high school diploma (T Telecom press release, 12th, November, 2012).

Moreover, authenticity was understood from the perspective of legitimacy rather than differentiation. Brand manager 2, who was in charge of brand strategy of the organization, explained authenticity as important element in branding as below.

[We are perceived as] a company who snatches money from customers' pocket, a company who earns money easily without effort...We really do not have a single ally...People do not perceive us as a good or authentic company. In particular, almost half our customers criticize us mercilessly in the internet. The only way is to continue our effort to convince people that we are a trustworthy and authentic business (Brand manager 2).

[We shouldn't have] an image like the shepherd boy who keeps saying that he will do something and actually does nothing [for society]...[We are aware that] tricks to escape the situation do not work anymore. Customers nowadays have become too sensible and savvy to be fooled by empty stories. Topics like trust and authenticity are discussed a lot in our company...As such, the time has come when we need to change, or rather we should have changed a bit earlier (Brand manager 2).

In comparison to the high pressure for legitimacy reflected above, managers of the organization seemed to feel less urgency to differentiate their brand, and this applied particularly to employer branding. As presented the quotation below, they indicated unique features of the job market in Korea, and an imbalance between demand and supply in the market, as the reasons for this.

The Korean job market is small and talents are homogeneous...also it has very typical language. [In other words, the Korean job market is one that is naturally bounded by the Korean language.] Thus the talent barrier is higher than the business barrier (HR manager 1).

Nevertheless, there are too many candidates in the job market. There are several hundred thousand graduates from the top five universities and overseas universities every year. Except for a very limited number of super talents, the supply of talent is ample regardless what employer branding we employ. Although people compare us unfavourably with our past achievements [in terms of growth], T Telecom is still well placed in the market (HR manager 4).

The conservative approach of HR managers went as far as openly conceding that they had not made any explicit effort to advance the employer branding of their company, as the quotations below show.

Our corporate and product brand are so strong that new employees are likely to come to us without additional endeavours on our part (HR manager 1).

Although we do not systemize or manage our employer branding, I think, we already enjoy an employer brand which is strong enough. We have given it some thought but there did not appear much need for action. We have already had enough candidates, and the corporate brand fulfils the role [of employer brand] (HR manager 1).

Status as a peripheral organization

Employees of the organization often reflected on themselves as part of a peripheral organization, as epitomized in the reference to “lone-wolf heroes” in the following interview excerpt. Although it was not clear if this self-conception as a peripheral organization worked as a factor for embeddedness or agency, the phenomenon itself seems to be noticeable.

I think it is a matter of Korean identity. Our country could not have survived without being prepared to go out into the world. Thus, no matter how successful a company is in the domestic market, it cannot be free from the political agenda [i.e. the necessity of going global], [otherwise] it is like one of these asocial lone-wolf heroes who cannot be understood in Korean sentiment at all (employee 3).

In particular, the notion of periphery became evident in comparison to company A and B, which had led and met societal values.

The current chairman often talks about matters which are complex to understand, and it is difficult for anybody to say what was the punch line. Although chairman D [honorary chairman of group A] is inarticulate in his speech and has been criticized in terms of various aspects, he seems to be offering our society a new agenda (anonymous participant).

Furthermore, my employer is a typical domestic company. Since 2003, we have tried to acquire the image of a contributor to national economy by seriously attempting to do business abroad; all in vain. It's a pity. It seems impossible for my employer to overcome this negative image. No matter how much company A is criticized, it greatly benefits from the image that it enhances the status of our nation in the world. This kind of image is not possible for us to attain to (employee 5).

Internal factors

The organization showed some level of agency and this can be explained in terms of some factors at organizational level.

Management philosophy

The management philosophy of the organization, the TMS, was said to be the reason for the fact that the organization was different from other organizations in Korea. This notion was not confined to managers; it was also generally accepted by employees.

Is there any other large company in Korea, which stresses management philosophy as much as T group? (General manager).

Basically, the roles of TMS are great, I think... since the previous chairman established a good framework (employee 11).

The reason I decided to join T Telecom is...Because although previous chairman B was dead, I really liked his views on human resources. I expected that human resources would be given key significance in this company according to his philosophy (employee 1).

In similar vein, some managers and employees understood that attitudes of the founding family of T group were different from those of other groups in Korea, as presented below.

[One of the main factors of horizontal organizational culture is] the attitude of the so-called 'owners'. I think the main reason chairman C [who was a professional executive] could stress the harmony between owners and professional executives was that founding chairman B treated him as a partner in management. The current chairman A also uses respectful language and behaviour toward executives and encourages open discussions in the organization (General manager).

Nevertheless, CEO was president B [who projected the image of professional executive despite his background as a member of founding family] and chairman of group was chairman C [who was a model professional executive of that time] when I joined my employer...Thus my employer had a more professional image than company A or B at that time. Anyhow, the situation has become worse and worse (anonymous participant).

As seen above, the notion that attitudes of 'owners' in the past were "different" was not confined to managers and it may lie at the foundation of the organization's agency.

This notion of difference shared by managers and employees was also supported by a speech of the previous chairman B in 1979, which was quoted in TMS as below.

Corporate management has a very short history in Korea...The nonuniformity of management techniques causes conflicting objectives, communication breakdowns and impaired decision-making...Consequently, for a proper and uniform understanding of the essence of management, a unified definition of management must be developed and adopted by managers as their criterion for decision-making (TMS, 2008).

However, current leaders have not been successful in providing members with a sense of difference, as emerges in the last part of the interview excerpt of anonymous participant above.

Corporate history

Relative youth as a *Chaebol* company and corporate establishment on the basis of M&A were suggested as enabling factors of agency by the organization.

Firstly, the fact that it is a relatively young organization, established in the late 1980s and taking over company I in the mid 1990s, was noted as factor of agency.

As an organization consolidated in the mid 1990s...a relatively young atmosphere could be maintained and this could be the main reason for [a horizontal organizational culture], I guess (General manager).

Secondly, since the organization was formed as a result of M&A, the portion of career employees from various other organizations was bigger compared with non-M&A based organizations which have recruited employees primarily through the annual or biannual large scale open-recruitment system (*gongchae* in Korean). Therefore, the seniority-based systems (*kisoo*), which form one of the main elements of hierarchical culture in Korean organizations, were less prominent in the organization. These points are illustrated below.

There are a fair number of career employees in my organization...the kisoo culture is vague...Members of my employer speak their mind in the organization (employee 9).

It seems that there has hardly been room for the kisoo culture to develop in my organization. Most executives of company I left the company when it was acquired by my organization. Although large scale gonchaes were performed in company I before, it took a long time for these intakes to be promoted to executive level. Most of executives of my organization right after the acquisition were original members from T group, yet a good number of executives were also brought in from the outside. Therefore, you didn't find gongchae members dominating the organization and forming a command and discipline relationship from the CEO, through executives to rank-and-file employees, which is common in old manufacturing companies [in Korea] (General manager).

In similar vein, the 'pure blood principle', which favors *gongchae* members over career members, seemed not to be operative or to be t in the organization. Brand manager 3 suggested this as the main reason for him/her to reject an offer from company A and to join the case organization. Brand manager 2 pointed out the absence of the principle as one of the major strengths of the organization in the quotation below.

When I joined this organization as a career employee, I considered seriously if the pure blood principle was working here or not. I dropped an offer from company A immediately since I felt suffocated due to the principle when I worked for their affiliated company in the past (Brand manager 3).

It is very interesting that there is no pure blood principle in my organization...I think T Telecom is only the case even in the whole T group...We are relatively open and all-embracing, I think it is a strength of my organization (Brand manager 2).

Conclusion of finding 3

The employer's status and roles as a sensegiver were understood as limited by managers and employees of the organization. Whereas the organization showed embeddedness in terms of organizational growth discourse, it also exhibited agency in regard to establishment of horizontal organizational culture. However, the latter was limited in its scope since the agentic capacity became weaker when organizational growth gave way to slowdown. Factors of embeddedness

were suggested as operating primarily from outside of organization, i.e. high societal demands of legitimacy. By contrast, factors of agency were found to be explained in terms of organizational internal factors, i.e. management philosophy, attitudes of the founding family and a weak tradition of *gongchae* culture.

Chapter conclusion

The current chapter presents the main findings of the thesis which was guided by three research questions. In regard to research question 1 ‘how do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?’, discussion yielded two main categories, to some extent contradictory of one another, in terms of which employees made sense of employer branding: growth obsession and immanent individualism.

In finding 2, societal actors including the state, religion and the family emerged as main actors that influenced employees’ growth obsession and immanent individualism.

Finding 3 showed the organization’s embeddedness in designing and practicing employer branding in regard to growth obsession. The organization showed agency in implementing horizontal organizational culture, drawing on societal values of individualism against growth obsession. However, it seemed to be agency limited in strength and effect, which became weaker as the organization’s growth became subject to slowdown.

To sum up, findings showed that employer branding was a process of sensemaking by employees, and societal actors influenced the process significantly. The employer also showed a degree of both embeddedness and agency in regard to employer branding rather than acting in the role of dominant sensegiver.

Chapter 6. DISCUSSION

Chapter 6.

DISCUSSION: Contending logics and employer branding of an organization in Korea

Chapter introduction

The previous chapter revealed that employees' perceptions of employer branding primarily concerned two aspects: legitimacy through organizational growth and differentiation through horizontal organizational culture.

The former was closely aligned with national ideologies, e.g. nationalism, developmentalism and Confucianism, which have been associated with the rapid economic development of Korea (Kim & Park, 2003; Stubbs, 2009). From this perspective, the findings revalidate the impact of national context, although the importance of this societal level factor has been challenged in recent literature (Gerhart & Fang, 2005; McSweeney, 2002). Compared with the significant influence of national context on these perceptions, the influence of direct voices from the organization on employer branding was limited.

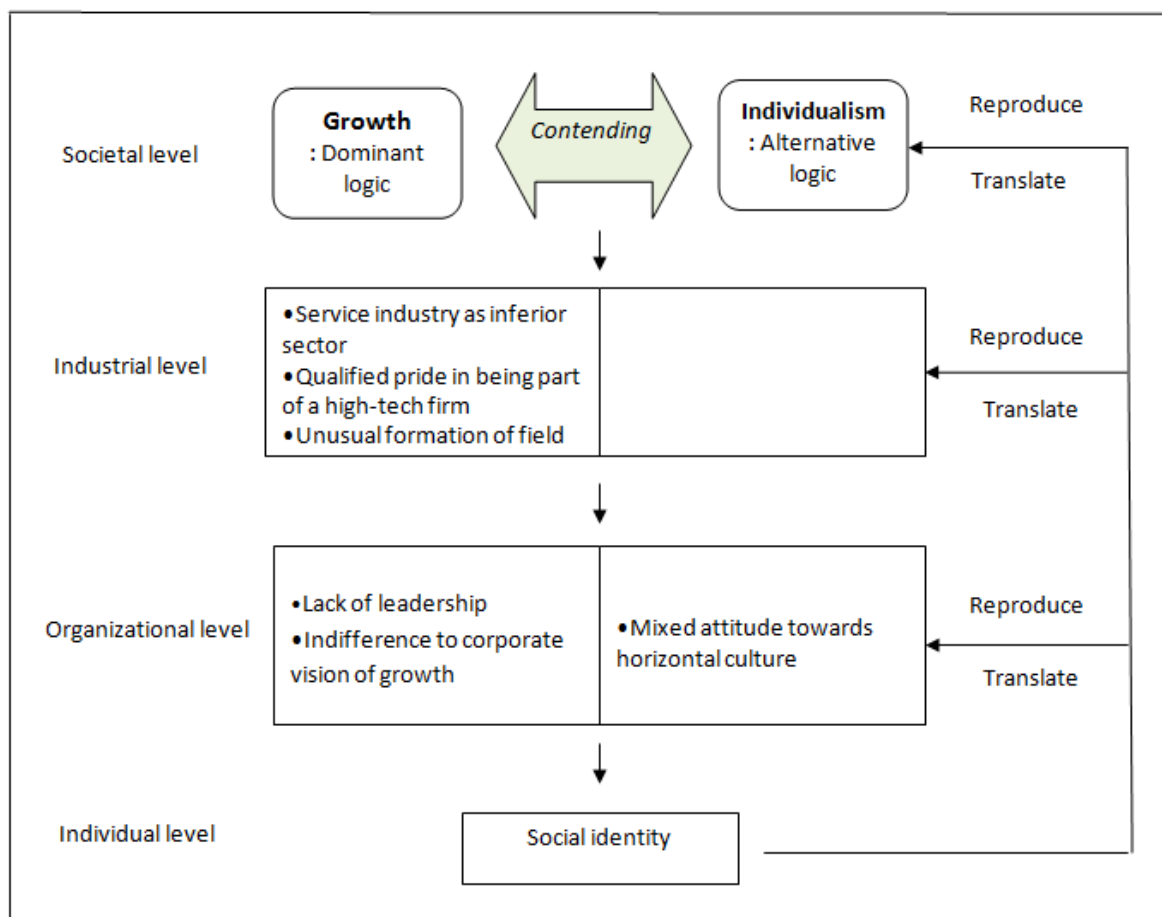
By contrast with the dominant influence of legitimacy through growth over individuals and the organization, individuals and the organization had more discretion in regard to differentiation through horizontal organizational culture.

Based on the findings, the current chapter discusses 'growth obsession' and 'immanent individualism' as two contrasting dimensions in employees' perceptions of employer branding of the organization in Korea. In explaining those two dimensions, this chapter draws on a contending logics perspective since this is an effective lens through which to look at the contradictory but interrelated dimensions of growth obsession and immanent individualism, while considering the wider societal context and overcoming the deterministic tendency of the existing relevant literature, i.e. the national culture literature.

This section argues for the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism as two contending logics at societal level influencing employees' perceptions of employer branding in Korea. Employees' sensemaking of the

organization's employer branding is illustrated in the framework of the current chapter (refer to Figure 6.1). Employees made sense of this employer branding under the significant influence of these contending logics. The left-hand segments of the boxes show that employees' sensemaking was primarily an effort to embrace divergence of their employer's reality from the dominant logic of growth and keep their social identity. They reproduced or translated industrial context, i.e. service or technology industry, and organizational context, i.e. corporate vision and leadership, in terms of the growth logic. Conversely, the right-hand segment of the box reflects Individuals' sensemaking of employer branding on the basis of the logic of individualism. In the process, employees showed more agency as illustrated in their mixed attitudes towards the horizontal organizational practices.

Figure 6.1 Relationship between Contending Logics and Individuals across Levels of Context in terms of Sensemaking of Employer Branding



Source: The author

The contributions of the current thesis are fivefold.

Firstly, the current thesis bridges micro-macro levels of analysis, resting on a firm basis at the individual level (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Basically, the thesis concentrates on understanding employer branding from the perspective of employees based on a social constructionist perspective. This starting point mandated the acquisition of data on how employees understood and constructed their organization's employer branding in their own words. The results vividly illustrated the significant influence of societal context on employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding and provide compelling evidence of the linkage of micro-macro levels in this respect.

Secondly, this approach to the data at multiple levels allows the thesis to raise an important question in regard to organizations' role as sensegiver of employer branding. By addressing the individual level (in close connection with societal level) and the organizational level, contrasting influences of the societal and organizational levels on individuals are revealed. Compared with the significant influence of the societal level, that of organization is limited. Based on this observation, I argue that the role of the organization as sensegiver has been accorded too much importance in most of the existing employer branding literature.

Through these two contributions, the thesis departs from the dominant tendency of existing employer branding literature, i.e. the one-sided functionalist, managerial, unitarist and context-free stance, which treats employees as consumers buying into their employer's propositions and practices (Aggerholm et al., 2011; Francis & Reddington, 2012; Martin & Cerdin, 2014).

Thirdly, the contributions above are reinforced by the adoption of an institutional approach, specifically a contending logics perspective. Few studies have considered employer branding in an institutional context. By drawing upon an institutional perspective, the thesis offers an effective explanation of the frames of reference applied in employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding.

The contending logics approach is also helpful in addressing the fourth contribution of the current thesis, the explicit discussion of the hybridity of the

context of Korea. Specifically, two contending logics, i.e. the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism were identified as operating at the societal level in Korea.

Lastly, the research findings point to the tension between legitimacy and differentiation as a specific field of conflict between the two contending logics. In particular, the current thesis shows how the dilemma of legitimacy vs. differentiation works in the context of employees. This is noteworthy since the existing understanding of the dilemma has been confined to the macro-meso level, at which organizations should strategically balance pressure from institutions and market according to the conditions of their specific situation. What the thesis reveals is that the dilemma also influences employees as well. That is, when legitimacy was satisfied through high organizational growth, differentiation through non-hierarchical organizational culture was appreciated, however, when the former was not met, the latter was rejected by some employees.

This chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, existing studies dealing with national context, i.e. national culture, institutional logics and national business systems (NBSs) literature, are discussed critically in terms of their views of causality (determinism) and in terms of the nature of the historical and structural considerations which each approach foregrounds and regards as explanatory. Then, the contending logics perspective is suggested as an alternative way of thinking about the effects of societal context. As the focal part of the discussion, two faces of employer branding in Korea, growth obsession and immanent individualism, are discussed in terms of the interaction of two contending logics, the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism.

Discussion 1. Societal context and contending logics

Societal context in existing employer branding literature

Consideration of wider societal influence is rarely acknowledged in the employer branding literature. Aggerholm et al. (2011) evaluated Ambler and Barrow's (1996) dominant definition of employer branding as lacking any consideration of societal demands, implying that the existing literature on employer branding fails to take account of this important constraint. The broader field of HRM study has also been criticized for the lack of wider contextual sensitivity by critical scholars such as Delbridge and Keenoy (2010).

Nevertheless, findings of the current thesis suggest that the influence of societal contexts is strong both on employees' perceptions of employer branding and on the organization's design of employer branding. Therefore, the current thesis attempts to overcome the limitation of the existing employer branding and HRM literature by addressing societal or national context through the eyes of employees of the organization. With this in mind, the existing approaches to societal or national context are discussed in the following section.

National context revisited

Effectiveness of national profiles

Nationality is no longer a taken for granted construct in the age of globalization (Wiley, 2004). As national borders and boundaries become blurred with globalization, the relevance of national context has come under increasing scrutiny. In a globalized world, the regulatory power of the nation-state governance system is in decline (Beck, 2000; Cutler, 2001; Kobrin, 2001) and cultural homogeneity within social communities is eroding due to processes of migration and individualization (Beck, 2000; Beck-Gernsheim & Beck, 2002). Thus, national culture, which is the most common theoretical foundation for exploring national context (Kostova, 1999), is increasingly seen as an outdated basis for dealing with the cultural complexity that transnational companies are facing (e.g. Soderberg, 2002).

Nevertheless, it is still generally accepted that a need for inclusive conceptualizations of national profiles has paradoxically increased with advanced globalization (Franke, Hofstede & Bond, 1991; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004). Scholars who argue for the sustained effectiveness of national profiles, call other issues which have been frequent in national culture studies into question rather than national profile itself. For example, Sackmann and Philipps (2004) took the view that the problem arose out of a mono-level approach and advocated a multiple culture perspective including national, organizational, regional and professional cultures. Lenartowicz and Roth (2001) suggested a definite national values pattern across subcultures. Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez and Gibson (2011) argued for the enduring significance of national context despite globalization on the basis of resurgent nationalism. Harzing and Sorge (2003) argued that difference in HRM among countries is a consistent research theme despite constant debate on the effectiveness of national profile.

Despite being limited in the volume of studies, the existence of employer branding literature which addresses the tension between the global and the local also paradoxically showed the effectiveness of national context profile (e.g. Martin & Groen-In't-Woud, 2011). Although a global company in the case study primarily sought corporateness through global integration, responding to the local was revealed to be still important in addressing brand authenticity.

With these debates as background, the findings of the current thesis are significant in asserting the continued effectiveness of national context in terms of three grounds. Basically, the link between national context and employer branding is an important topic since the management of employees is argued to be significantly different among countries despite the increasing trend towards globalization (Brewster, Sparrow & Harris, 2005; Ferner, 1997). Secondly, the current thesis takes a qualitative stance which focuses on employees' perspectives. This increases the significance of the findings asserting unabated influence of national context. This is because data emerging naturally from the employees' own lips, without direct prompt from the researcher, itself provides vivid testimony to micro-macro level linkages.

Furthermore, another layer of analysis, i.e. the organizational level, enriches the findings of the current thesis. These different levels of analysis enable the development of multi-faceted descriptions as follows: (a) how national context influenced employees' perceptions of their organization's employer branding (b) how the organization influenced employees' perceptions of employer branding and (c) how the organization was influenced by national context in designing employer branding targeting their employees.

Three approaches to national context

National context has been primarily considered in terms of three traditions: National culture, neo- institutionalism and National Business Systems (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Kynighou, 2014). National culture is the most common concept that explores national context, and the two latter traditions belong to the institutionalist strands which are now dominant within organization theory (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008; Kostova, 1999; Tempel & Walgenbach, 2007).

The current thesis assesses the relative efficacy of each of these three approaches in explaining the interaction between macro and micro level of analysis.

Table 6.1 Comparison of the Key Dimensions and Limitations of Three Traditions of National Context Studies

	National culture	Neo-institutionalism	NBSs
Determinism	Assumption of national uniformity	Over-socialized portrayal of actors	Tight feedback loop between business systems and institutions
Nature of historical & structural considerations	N/A	Normative and cognitive institutions, e.g. patterns of thought and taken for granted assumptions concerning organizational forms and management practices	Structural-regulative institutions, e.g. the state, financial system, skill development and control system, trust and authority relations

Source: Tempel & Walgenbach (2007)

[National] culture has been defined in diverse ways (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952): On the one hand, it is defined as "...explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived and selected ideas and their embodiment in institutions, practices and artifacts" emphasizing its normative aspect as the shared values of a group (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 357). On the other hand, Hofstede and Bond (1988: 6) have stressed the cognitive nature of culture, defining it as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another category."

Neo-institutionalism primarily addresses points relevant to the current thesis through the concept of 'institutional logic' or 'rationalized myth', which is defined as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: 804).

The institutional logics approach integrates the coercive, cognitive and normative dimensions of institutions (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). These dimensions reflect, respectively, existing laws and rules, taken-for-granted cognitive categories, and widely-shared values and norms. By contrast, studies based upon NBSs, defined as dynamic and emerging characteristics linked to patterns of historical development and distinctive national institutions, primarily address structural aspects of the societal level institutions such as political, financial and educational system and industrial relations (Ferner & Quintanilla, 1998).

Overcoming determinism

The most frequent criticism of the existing studies of national context, national culture study in particular, is their determinism. National culture has been predominantly conceptualized as a value system that precedes and constrains group members' behaviour either by 'collectively programming their minds' (Hofstede, 1980, 1995, 2001) or by imposing 'the way in which a group of people solve problems' (Trompenaars, 1993). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005: 13, 36) argued that national values are "as hard as a country's geographic position" and

“while change sweeps the surface, the deeper layers remain stable, and the [national] culture rises from its ashes like the phoenix.”

This perspective, which has its origins in positivist epistemology, posits that national culture determines group members' behaviors and the group's pattern of interaction (e.g. Bochner & Hesketh, 1994; Cox, Lobel & McLeod, 1991; Earley, 1993; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Tayeb, 1996). Other criticisms of national culture, e.g. 'national uniformity' (Archer, 1989; Etzioni, 1968; McSweeney, 2002) or 'the mythologies of a nation's greatness' (Featherstone, 2000; Laclau, 1994; Lyotard, 1984) reinforce the view that national context has been oversold as an explanatory variable. The assumption of national uniformity inherent in national culture has been criticized as a hindrance to understanding the intertwined and complex relationships in this area (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006).

The positivistic nature of the existing national culture studies is epitomized by their treatment of national culture as a pre-determined set of dimensions (e.g. Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Trompenaars, 1993). It has been criticized as overly simplistic and deterministic to reduce national culture to a four or five dimension conceptualization (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). The central weakness of 'dimensionalized' culture, as Hofstede (1980, 2001) and similar models conceived it, is that they are too simple to take account of “the importance or real meaning respondents ascribe in real situations to culture” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Soin & Scheytt, 2006: 66).

In particular, McSweeney (2002) argued that the drawback of the determinism of national culture primarily originated from the uni-level analysis of Hofstede's (1980). The conflation of national culture influence and uni-level analysis precludes consideration of interplay between macroscopic and microscopic cultural levels (McSweeney, 2002). McSweeney stressed the importance of a rich understanding of the diversity of national practices and institutions. In a similar vein, Gerhart and Fang (2005) and Ericksen and Dyer (2005) showed that organizational differences account for more variance in cultural values than do country differences and argued that the influence of national culture was overly emphasized.

Similarly, both NBSs and neo-institutional theory have been criticized as embodying structural determinism, i.e. neglect of human and organizational agency (Casson & Lundan, 1999; Reay, Golden-Biddle & Germann, 2006; Temple & Walgenbach, 2007).

The focus of the NBSs approach is on the development and reproduction of varied systems of economic organization, seen as the result of interdependencies between business systems and national institutional frameworks (Temple & Walgenbach, 2007). This tendency leads NBSs studies to emphasize stasis rather than change and to neglect that “every national business system ... contains some degree of malleability and openness which may be exploited through appropriate firm-specific managerial strategies” (Casson & Lundan, 1999; Quintanilla & Ferner, 2003: 365). Although there has been some notion of agency in the NBSs literature, it has been generally neglected (e.g. Smith & Meiksins, 1995).

Structural determinism has been the main ground for criticism of institutional theory. As discussed in the literature review chapter, early neo-institutional theory in the late 1970s and 1980s could be said to have regressed even from old institutionalism (e.g. Selznick, 1949) in terms of the accountability of agency, by focusing on explaining organizational homogeneity (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). These early neo-institutional studies highlighted increasing isomorphism among organizations which were under similar institutional pressures. Institutional theorists underlined the taken-for-granted nature of knowledge and action that causes organizations to be stable and insusceptible to change. It is often the case that organizations and individuals are assumed to adapt passively to institutions in these studies (e.g. Meyer et al., 1983; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1983; Tolbert, 1985). Therefore, human agency has been unquestioningly assumed as habitual and repetitive (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009). This approach of the early neo-institutionalists to “institutions as external constraints on organizational and human agency” (Battilana & D’Aunno, 2009: 36), however, has been criticized as “an oversocialized view of action” (*ibid*).

Responding to the criticism, institutional theorists have begun to embrace the subject of institutional change, a development which has brought the issue of organizational and human agency to the fore. Specific efforts to overcome determinism were made through the notion of ‘institutional entrepreneurship’ (DiMaggio, 1988), as discussed in the literature review chapter. However, as noted in that chapter, there still remains the paradox of embedded agency (Battilana & D’Annunzio, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002), epitomized in the question: “How can actors change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institution they wish to change?” (Holm, 1995: 398).

The institutional logics perspective primarily concerns “the effects of differentiated institutional logics on individuals and organizations in a larger variety of contexts” rather than restricting attention to isomorphism (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008: 100). By defining the content and meaning of institutions, which had previously remained “a black box” (Zucker, 1991: 105), the Institutional logics perspective opens the way to address the absence of microfoundations in neo-institutionalism, and thus brings structure and agency together (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). For example, the national culture approach assumes members’ socialization and deep internalization of cultural norms, thus is incompetent in explaining differences and change. By contrast, institutional logics affect individuals’ attitudes by shaping identities and providing incentives to alter behavior, thus have more capacity to explain diversity and change (Luo, 2007). In addition, institutional logics provide frames of reference which accommodate preconditions of sensemaking (Nielsen & Jensen, 2011).

Furthermore, research has recently started to acknowledge the existence of plural, contending, competing, or hybrid logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Greenwood et al., 2011; Hayes & Rajao, 2011; Kodeih & Greenwood, 2014; Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Pache & Santos, 2013; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Early institutional logics literature primarily concerned how new logics replace old ones at the field level (Haveman & Rao, 1997; Thornton, 2002) and this has been criticized as ‘institutional determinism’, as implying the view that institutions are so powerful that organizations and individuals totally conform to them (Seo & Creed, 2002). Institutional scholars have started to study the diffusion and

coexistence of multiple logics as hybrid logics, e.g. the business-like health care and medical professionalism logics in health care (Reay & Hinings, 2009), the judicial and bureaucratic logics in alternative dispute resolution (Purdy & Gray, 2009), and the science and care logics within the medical profession (Dunn & Jones, 2010).

Overcoming the problem of ahistorical cultural research

The cultural approach has been also criticized as ahistorical (Ferner & Quintanilla, 1998) and ignoring economic factors (Gray & Lunda, 1993). Critics have argued that no matter how well business organizations accord with cultural beliefs, they are fundamentally responding to market opportunities and conditions. On the basis of this criticism, Hamilton and Biggart (1988) argued that the national culture approach should be used in parallel with a market approach.

NBSs were originally conceptualised as explaining the rapid economic development of four key Asian economies, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, while addressing criticisms of the national cultural approach (e.g. Whitley 1992, 1999a, b). Inside the HRM discipline, according to Thompson (2011), NBSs were also seen as an alternative approach which might help overcome the neglect of politics and political economy typical of 'soft' HRM including employer branding, which is 'naively' optimistic about the control of employees 'from within' based on culture.

A key difference between NBSs and institutional logics lies in their approach to institutions and the nature of the institutions upon which they focus. NBSs focus on structural-regulative institutions, such as financial and training systems, which are often underpinned by coercive mechanisms (Djelic & Quack, 2003). In contrast, institutional logics focus in particular on what Scott (2001) calls normative and cognitive institutions: patterns of thought, norms and taken-for-granted assumptions (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2007). Thus NBSs are more suitable to understand business behavior in terms of the interrelationships between market structures, the financial system and the nature of corporate governance and control systems (Ferner & Quintanilla, 1998). By contrast, institutional logics,

based as they are on the cultural turn in neo-institutionalism, address symbolic aspects, i.e. systems of meaning, as well as material aspects, i.e. systems of practices (Thornton et al., 2012). The cultural turn in neo-institutionalism in itself indicates that some neo-institutionalists like Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Zucker (1977) have taken account of the role of culture and cognition in institutional analysis.

Contending logics as a new approach to societal context

As seen above, institutional logics have attracted attention as an alternative theory and method of analysis for understanding the influences of societal level context on the cognition and behavior of individual and organizational actors (DiMaggio, 1997).

Institutional theorists generally view organizations as “sites of situated social action” in the process of being socially constructed (Biggart & Guillen, 1999; Clegg & Hardy, 1996: 4). However, there have been criticisms of research on institutional logics that treats “institutional shifts as period effects that segregate one relatively stable period of beliefs and activities from another” (Lounsbury, 2007: 289). By contrast, the contending logics perspective suggests that there are ongoing negotiations and conflicts that emerge within and between institutions; in this sense, it is more in line with social constructionist or social constructivist view of institutions (Blackler & Regan, 2006; Townley, 2002).

The remaining issue is that most contending logics studies have focused on how the contending logics affect fields of organizations or individual organizations (Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2013). Thus, there is an absence of research on how individuals cope with these contending logics (Kraatz & Block, 2008; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Pache & Santos, 2013). In other words, there has been a lack of understanding on how individuals do institutional sensemaking (Weick, 1995; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). The current thesis attempts to address this gap by focusing on employees’ sensemaking of employer branding under the influences of contending logics.

This approach is important because, although compatibility between the institutional logics perspective and sensemaking theory has been noted, limited research has linked them (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). Combining them enables a symmetrical approach to macro and micro levels: institutional logics are “the building blocks or substance” of sensemaking and sensemaking is a transformation mechanism of institutional logics (Weber & Glynn, 2006: 1644). Institutional logics are sensemaking constructs that embody conventionalized understandings about what is normal, reasonable and appropriate (Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

The above considerations support the idea that the adoption of the contending logics perspective is effective in addressing limitations of the employer branding literature, which has generally addressed the organizational level of analysis, while neglecting the individual and the societal levels of analysis. In other words, the contending logics perspective enables us to achieve sensitivity to the societal context, while overcoming the universalist ‘best practice’ approach of the existing HRM study (Francis & Reddington, 2012).

Hybridity of the Korean context

Prevalent understanding of the Korean societal context and organizations has predominantly been influenced by the work of Hofstede and his coauthors, which projected it as highly collectivistic, hierarchical and masculine, intolerant to some extent of uncertainty, and characterized by a long-term orientation (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Institutionalists (e.g. Orru, Biggart & Hamilton, 1991; Seo & Creed, 2002) also evaluated Korea before the Asian financial crisis in 1997 as a highly institutionalized context with tightly woven institutional arrangements among the government, banks and business organizations.

Although the coexistence of contradictory dimensions in Korea has been noted, it cannot be said that the hybridity of the Korean context at the societal level has been studied in earnest; attention has been confined mostly to the level of organizations, as will be seen below.

Some scholars have explained Korean organizational culture as a composite of Asian and Western values, the result of contact with the West and globalization (Bae, 1997; Cho & Park, 1998; Koch, Nam & Steers, 1995; Ungson, Steers & Park, 1997). Jang and Chung (1995 cited in Lee, 1998) argued that Korean management practices should be understood in terms of the coexistence of traditional Confucian values and Western values. Jang and Chung explained that Koreans do not see this contradiction as a problem and usually feel easy about the coexistence in this sphere of inconsistent ways of thinking. According to them, one of the major challenges for Korean management is to balance the two sets of values. Ungson and his coauthors (1997) wrote that individualism and group spirit are both equally strong in Korea. Cho and Park (1998: 27) also recognized that Korean corporate culture is multidimensional and paradoxical: "A mixture of harmony and change, face-saving and aggressiveness, and emotional community and impersonal achievement". They labeled this hybrid of conflicting cultural traits as 'dynamic collectivism'.

The current thesis attempts to develop a further understanding of the hybridity of the Korean context taking a contending logics perspective, which promises to throw light upon both symbolic and material aspects of the relevant contexts. Although the institutional approach has rarely been applied to developing country contexts due to the general weakness of their institutions (Baggart & Guillen, 1999; Hoskisson, Eden, Lau & Wright, 2000; Wright, Filatotchev, Hoskisson & Peng, 2005), it has been noted that institutional characteristics in developing country contexts still have their unique explanatory power. For example, in a study of multinational enterprises (MNEs) based in developing countries, Cuervo-Cazurra and Genc (2008) explained the reason why they are more prevalent in the least developed countries (LDCs) than elsewhere mainly in terms of relative strength of institutions.

Discussion 2. Two faces of employer branding

This section concerns two somewhat contradictory dimensions of employer branding in Korea-growth obsession and immanent individualism. It is proposed here that those dimensions should be seen as outcomes of different modes of interaction between two contending logics: the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism. In the following section, each of these logics is considered.

Two contending logics

The logic of growth: the dominant logic

Growth was the prevalent element in employees' sensemaking of employer branding and the current thesis sheds light on this as instantiating the dominant institutional logic. A vast literature on [organizational] growth has developed over the last several decades (Child & Kiser, 1981; Greve, 2008; Hay & Morris, 1991; Penrose, 1959; Starbuck, 1965; Whetten, 1987). Growth has been considered as one of the most important performance criteria by which a firm is evaluated (Penrose, 1959; Greve, 2008). However, the focus of the organizational growth literature has been generally confined to conceptualizing or measuring it or identifying factors of it (Human & Matthews, 2004).

Contrastingly, growth as a goal or as a value has scarcely been studied. The most relevant approach has been made in national culture literature through the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, Confucian dynamism or performance orientation (e.g. Javidan & House, 2001; Franke et al., 1991). However, this approach mainly aims to verify causal links between some particular dimensions of national culture and growth rather than illuminating characteristics of growth itself as a value.

In shedding light on growth as a value, the current thesis focuses on employees' perspective. This is a novel approach since the already scarce literature on growth as a value primarily concerns direct or indirect influences of

organizational growth on employees (in effect treating employees as objects) rather than elucidating it through the eyes of employees.

Orientation towards the pursuit of growth is a typical attribute of business organizations. However, the difference of Korean context lies in the fact that most of societal sectors - the state, the religion, the family, and the market as well as the corporation— among seven major societal sectors (Thornton et al., 2012)— indiscriminately subscribe to some version of a logic of growth as illustrated in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Logic of Growth in Major Sectors of Societal Level

Sector	Growth logic relevant aspects
State	‘Stability first, participation later’ principle, ‘Development first, share later’ principle, Debate on ‘Growth before welfare vs. Welfare before growth’
Religion	Pro-growth Confucian values
Family	Educational aspiration and achievement
Market	Winner-take-all principle
Community	Achievement oriented values

Source: Kim & Park (2000); Kim & Park (2003); Park (1993)

In the following section, a discussion of how major sectors at societal level in Korea produce and support the logic of growth is structured by a focus on three major institutions, the state, religion and the family.

The State

Among major sectors at societal level, the state is most evidently influential in relation to the logic of growth. Growth provides legitimacy in a late-industrializing country and this has been noted as one of the representing characteristics of the developmental state model (Dean, 2000; Leftwich, 1995). Thus the link between growth and the state in Korea has been firmly supported in the literature, with the result that Korea has been seen as one of the model countries of developmentalism (Lee & Han, 2006), a set of ideas which emphasizes the political primacy of economic development as dynamic of institutions and policies and as the fundamental means of political legitimacy.

The emphasis on growth as legitimacy is a unique development peculiar to developmental states like Korea (Johnson, 1999). This is divergent from Weber's tradition, the roots of the modern approach to legitimacy (Johnson, 1999). Rather than based on the traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic sources, which are the sources of authority identified by Weber (1968), it is the revolutionary authority of a people committed to the transformation of their social, political, or economic order. "Legitimation occurs from the state's achievements, not from the way it came to power...This is the legitimacy that comes from the devotion to a widely believed-in revolutionary project" (Johnson 1999: 52-53).

However, scholars have noted the possibility that the influence of the state on the growth narrative has decreased. Johnson (1999: 53) pointed out that legitimacy based on goal achievements is unstable compared with legitimacy based on legal authority since the former legitimacy requires constant confirmation in terms of performance whereas the latter becomes stable once it is acquired. In a similar vein, leadership based on that kind of legitimacy is unstable like "that of commanders on the battlefield", which fluctuates according to defeat or victory achieved by their people, rather than their own vision or charisma. Redding and Witt (2010) argued that the rationale of business stressing contributions made to the nation has started to change into a shareholder emphasis among a younger generation as a result of the Asian financial crisis and Westernization of Korean society.

What the findings of the current thesis primarily revealed and confirmed, however, is that the influence of the growth narrative, initiated by the developmental state was strong enough that it has taken several decades to disappear. The growth narrative has not remained as an ideology but worked as the dominant institutional logic into which employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding was embedded.

At this point, understanding of the distinction between ideology and institutional logic is required. Ideology, which has been superficially defined in many areas in social sciences, becomes a more problematic term in institutionalism because of its elusive relationship with institutional logics (Vogel, 2009). Responding to the criticism, Thornton et al. (2012: 5) clearly distinguished the two terms as follows:

whereas ideology refers to “a relatively rigid and value-laden doctrine of thought”, the institutional logics perspective underlines “the interpenetration of the symbolic and material aspects of institutions”. Vogel (2009: 93) also explained that whereas the former only indicates the symbolic dimension, the latter emphasizes “the conflation of symbolic constructions and material practices”.

The dominant logic of growth has in the past provided the formal and informal principles that inform and constrain organizational conduct and cognition (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) as exemplified in the ‘Stability before participation principle’ and the ‘Growth before redistribution principle’ of the state in Korea (Kim & Park, 2000, 2003). These principles have been seen to lead to the Korean people’s ‘economy-first’ national psyche (Kim, 2013). The current debate in Korean society on ‘Growth before welfare vs. Welfare before growth’ is an illustration that the logic of growth is still working at the societal level.

Specifically, the findings of the current thesis implicitly verified the significant roles of the state in the dominant logic of growth. This implicit influence can be confirmed through the convergence of employees’ ideal employer with characteristics of the developmentalism which was driven by the state of Korea from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The first and second features of the ideal employer, contributing to national economic development through high growth, represent typical values of developmentalism. Business organizations were generally considered as not purely profit-seeking entities but as part of the state, thus they are responsible for pursuing national developmental goals in the context of a developmental regime (Ozen & Akkemik, 2012). Korean organizations’ growth was considered as an element to match government designed development schemes that aimed at achieving rapid national economic development (Lee & Trim, 2008). Korean organizations have achieved their growth based on governmental support which allowed them priority access to limited national resources. The state could make an organization win or lose and Korean organizations have operated in a highly politicized environment (Kim & Yi, 1999; Lee & Trim, 2008). As a rationale for

the ‘favor’ shown to a limited number of business organizations, their responsibility to contribute to the country’s economic development has been emphasized (Redding & Witt, 2010).

Thirdly and fourthly, employees’ preference for companies that do business abroad, and their sense that being part of a service company somehow took them out of the mainstream, are also related to developmentalism. Korea achieved growth based on export-oriented manufacturing industry (Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990; Woo, 1991) and people internalized the belief that they could progress economically and sustain the stability and unity of their country only by continuing in the same vein, with economies locked in manufacturing paradigms reliant on Western markets (Walsh, 2012).

Lastly, a preference for large companies as employers among employees, despite the strong antipathy felt towards these companies, supports congruence between the logic of the state and employees’ perceptions. In a rare study which analyzed the Korean context from an institutional logics perspective, Biggart and Guillen (1999) argued that large *Chaebols* counted as members of a legitimate category of actors, which they noted as the conceptual core of an institutional perspective. They explained the factor of the weakness of Korea’s auto component industry, in terms of the dominance of large companies (usually engaged in auto assembly business) over small and medium-sized companies (usually doing auto component business).

The findings of the current thesis showed that employees of the organization had the construed external image or construed identity of their employer as ‘a large, but low-growing, domestic service company – thus a non-contributor to national economic development’ and the logic of growth which has root in the growth narrative of the state of Korea worked as the frame of reference. Construed identity refers to how employees view external stakeholders’ perceptions of their organization, including family, friends, employees of other organizations, the press and other media (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994).

These findings fill gaps in the neo-institutionalism literature as well as the employer branding literature. Identity remains an implicit theme in most of the

neo-institutional literature. The rare exception is Scott and Lane's (2000) research, which viewed organizational identity as emerging from complex and dynamic interactions between organizational members and organizational stakeholders. The situation has been same in the area of employer branding studies. Although researchers have acknowledged construed identity as an important influence on employer brand signals (Martin & Cerdin, 2014), they have not explicitly noted its link with societal context. External stakeholders have been treated as mere audience in the process, thus the interaction between organizational members and organizational stakeholders was studied in a mechanistic way. The current thesis is the first attempt to fill the gap of the existing employer branding literature by noting the embeddedness of construed identity into the logic of growth at the societal level.

Religion

Another societal institutional order which prominently supports the logic of growth is religion: Confucianism¹⁵. The logic of growth can be categorized as an external logic, which was developed in other institutional fields, i.e. the West. Traditional Confucianism was originally considered as a barrier to economic growth since it despises economic activities and wealth accumulation (Weber, 1951). However, the counter-argument has been made that Confucianism provided Asian countries with a dynamic for economic development by emphasizing diligence, self-discipline, a this-world oriented attitude, education and group loyalties. As the Protestant ethic justified capitalism, these pro-growth Confucian values have been argued to have played a significant role in the industrialization of East Asia (Berger & Hsiao, 1988; Chan, 1996; Morishima, 1982; Tai, 1989; Yu & Lee, 1995). It is the spectacular economic development of the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) including Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, in the 1970s and 1980s, that requires a better understanding of the dynamics in the region. By contrast to the West, these Asian countries have achieved their growth despite low development of individualistic values. Instead, it was argued that authoritarian government and organization and collectivist

¹⁵There have been many debates for last three decades on whether Confucianism is a religion or a philosophy. However, this means that Confucianism has at least some characteristics which support its description as a religion. Reflecting the ambiguity, Confucianism has been referred to as 'religio-philosophical tradition' (Weber, 2009).

norms supported by Confucian tradition played an enabling role. In pro-growth Confucian values transferred to the industrial setting, the individual was assumed to owe a great obligation to his or her organization's interest and identify with the goals of the organization (Kim & Park, 2003).

The family

The family is one of the main societal institutions which support the logic of growth in Korea. Family values have been hugely influenced by Confucianism, which views it as the basis and the prototype for all social relationships (King & Bond, 1985). In particular, family values based on Confucianism encouraged high educational aspiration and achievement (Kim & Park, 2000). Koreans believe in education as the most promising avenue for personal, family, and national prosperity. Indeed, they consider gaining higher education even as a moral imperative for all individuals, regardless of gender, family background and social class (*ibid*).

The logic of individualism: the alternative logic

The alternative logic of individualism is based on individualism, the ideology or cultural value that emphasizes the worth of the individual and advocates the precedence of the interests of the individual over those of the state or a social group (Wood, 1972). Individualism has been defined in numerous ways (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985; Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Kagitçibasi, 1997; Kim, 1994; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995, 1996). Above all, individualism has often been highlighted as an opposite of collectivism in national culture literature. Typical attributes associated with individualism are independence, autonomy, fairness, self-reliance, uniqueness, achievement orientation and competitive spirit. On the other hand, collectivism is associated with a sense of duty toward one's group, interdependence, co-operation, others-orientation, harmony, conformity, forgiveness and social usefulness (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). In regard to motivational domains, self-direction, enjoyment and achievement have been closely related with individualism whereas pro-social, security and restrictive conformity have been seen to connect with collectivism (Schwartz & Bilsky,

1987). Individualism is a tendency to give priority to the goals of individuals whereas collectivism is an inclination to give priority to the goals of collectives (Triandis, McCusker & Betancourt, 1993). However, it needs also to be noted that individualist and collectivist attitudes are not mutually exclusive (Bontempo, 1993; Cha, 1994; Georgas, 1989; Kim, 1994; Kim, Triandis, Kagitçibasi, Choi & Yoon, 1994; Realo, Koido, Ceulemans & Allik, 2002; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994; Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo & Betancourt, 1986).

Individualism has been introduced to Korea in the course of modernization and economic development over the last four decades (Hahn & Ahn, 1994). According to Wei-ming (1996), individualism has been seen as one of three key dimensions of modernity, with market economy and democratic polity. Contacts with Western and especially American cultural beliefs and practices led Koreans to challenge their traditional values and promote individualism in turn (Hyun, 2001). In particular, supranational institutions such as the IMF were noted as main actors in promoting Western logics including the logic of individualism (Stiglitz, 2002). With the Asian economic crisis in 1997, the IMF provided a large loan to Korea and required reforms based on neoliberal economic principles (Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998). Responding to demands of the IMF, the state of Korea launched efforts in economic restructuring by promoting labour-market flexibility and westernizing Korean organizational practices (Lee & Frenkel, 2004).

According to Hofstede (2001), Korea rates very low on the individualism index (18 points, the 43rd in rank out of 53 countries). However, some change is apparent in this area. Some scholars argued that Korea has been in transition from collectivism to individualism (Yoon & Choi, 1994). It has been suggested that the two values can coexist (Shin & Kim, 1994; Yang, 1999).

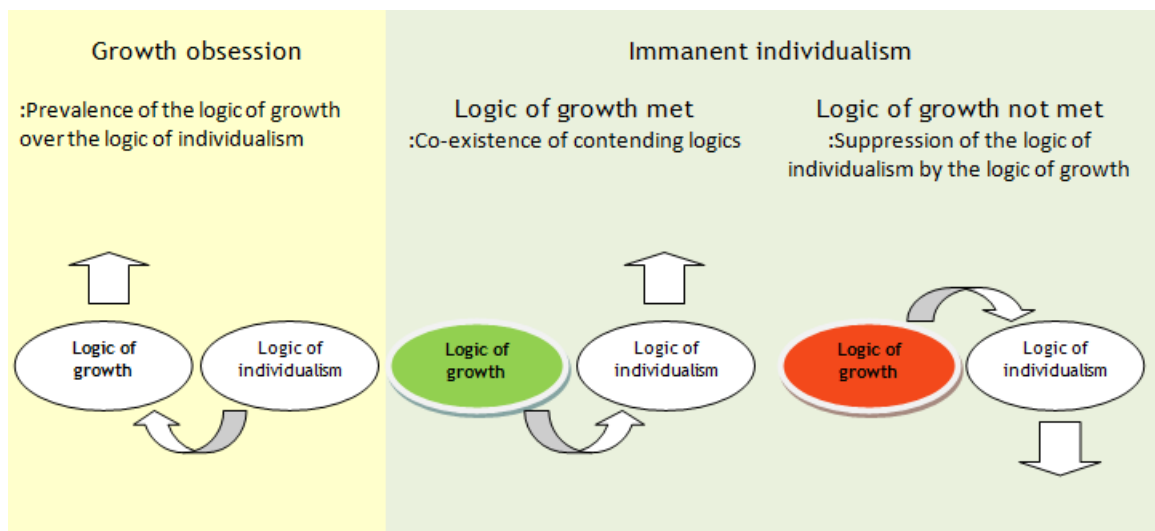
What is noteworthy, however, is that the individualism developed in Korea has been understood as not same as that in the West. For example, Cho (1994: 230) described the individualism in Korea as “a distorted form of ego-centrism and pursuit of self-convenience.”

The current thesis places individualism into the frame of institutional logic, since it dynamically influences and is modified back by actors rather than being conserved as a rigid value-laden doctrine of thought, i.e. an ideology (Thornton et al., 2012).

Interaction of two contending logics

Contending logics coexist or either logic comes to prevail over the other. These interactions provide an opportunity for hybridization or result in a temporary compromise or truce according to the situation (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009).

Figure 6.2 Interaction of Contending Logics



Source: The author

Findings of the current thesis showed that these two themes in employees' sensemaking of employer branding, i.e. growth obsession and immanent individualism, were outcomes of different relationships between the two contending logics as presented in Figure 6.2.

On the one hand, growth obsession was the result of total supremacy of the dominant logic of growth over the alternative logic of individualism. It was even observable that the alternative logic of individualism in this case supported the dominant logic of growth. The current thesis explains this as the outcome when the alternative logic of individualism, which in the Korean context may be

regarded as a logic of egocentricity and self-serving (Cho, 1994), supports the dominant logic of growth. This phenomenon was illustrated in the finding that employees made sense of their employer's growth slowdown, from their own more-realistic and self-centered perspective.

On the other hand, immanent individualism consisted of two sub-modes: When the organization achieved some level of growth, i.e. satisfied the dominant logic of growth, the alternative logic of individualism had room to move along. Contrastingly, when the organization's growth had been suspended, i.e. the logic of growth was not fulfilled, the alternative logic of individualism dwindled. The current thesis explains this in terms of suppression of the logic of individualism by the logic of growth. In this situation, employees dismissed the logic of individualism as paternalism which hampered organizational growth. By assimilating the logic of individualism with paternalism, which is an antithesis of the logic of growth, employees rejected the logic of individualism, and instead kept their social identity that was in line with the logic of growth.

The degree of embeddedness and agency of individuals and the organization differed in these two different modes of interaction of contending logics. [Institutional] embeddedness has been defined as "the nesting of firm and market behavior in a social and normative context" (Oliver, 1996: 167). The embeddedness of the interests, identities, values, and assumptions of individuals and organizations within prevailing institutional logics is a core premise of the institutional logics perspective (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Agency has been defined as "an actor's ability to have some effect on the social world — altering the rules, relational ties, or distribution of resources" (Scott, 2008: 77). Employees showed high levels of embeddedness in regard to the dominant logic of growth, yet had some capacity of sensemaking as discussed in the following section. Employees' agency increased in the dimension of immanent individualism, to the extent that they were able to square contending logics in such a way as to keep their social identity. The limited role of the organization in relation to the dominant logic runs counter to the general tendency of employer branding literature, which assumes that organizations have a strong sense-giving capability. Furthermore, this contrasting observation calls for

reconsideration of the existent dominant view which sees the organization as an invariably 'organized' entity (Watson, 1994). Rather, organizations can be understood in terms of flux, oscillating between passive and active sensegiver according to conditions within and outside of the organization.

Each point raised above is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Growth obsession: Prevalence of growth logic over individualistic logic

The current thesis argues that growth obsession is the outcome of the prevalence of the dominant societal logic of growth over the alternative logic of individualism. Cho (2000: 409) noted the growth obsessed aspect of Korean society and explained it in terms of "the socio-politico-cultural reorganization of a society towards growth." He argued that this involved the societal integration of Koreans towards the target of growth as well as focused distribution of national resources for growth. Whereas Cho argued for growth obsession as a phenomenon at macro-level through conceptual study, the current thesis explains the mechanism behind the growth obsession phenomenon in terms of the prevalence of the dominant logic of growth over the alternative logic of individualism. Furthermore, the current thesis shows empirically how individuals responded to the dominant logic of growth which has penetrated their minds to a significant extent in the later part of the discussion chapter.

Why is the logic of growth still dominant?

Korean society has been argued to be passing through a transformational process (Lee, 1998; Lee & Trim, 2008), thus debate on the effectiveness of developmentalism and Confucianism has been raised. It has been argued that the exhortation to 'work hard and sweat' for national goals had begun to lose its power to attract employees in Korea (Kim & Park, 2003; Lee & Trim, 2008). This began to happen from the early 1980s when employees realized that they were not properly receiving 'a fruit of their diligence and sacrifice', despite the achievement of the main national goal, i.e. economic development. In particular, Korean employees have been understood as not identifying closely with their employer's goal any more since the 1997 financial crisis when traditional

employment practices, including lifetime employment began to be replaced by the Western ones (Park & Kim, 2005). Then why were employees of the organization still influenced strongly by the logic of growth? The current thesis suggests two reasons, the path dependency of developmentalism and the support lent by the alternative logic of individualism to the dominant logic of growth.

A. Path dependency of developmentalism

Although Korea has seemingly been swiftly transformed from the developmental state model after the 1997 financial crisis (Lim & Jang, 2006), there have been debates on whether Korea's developmental state has been totally eclipsed or not (e.g. Cherry, 2005; Chu, 2009). Leaving this debate out of the discussion, it can still be argued that the path dependency of developmentalism ought to be taken into account. That is, developmentalism has occupied so central a location that ideas and policies of it are deeply embedded in a whole system of society as well as the formal institutions and informal practices of government (Stubbs, 2009).

It has also been noted that although the state faced the new challenge of dealing with business organizations which had become stronger than before, the relationship between the state and organizations was not necessarily antagonistic (Weiss, 1995). In other words, even when the state cannot be dominant in the government-business relationship, the two parties can form mutually enhancing relationship.

B. Support from the alternative logic of individualism

The 'cruel' world of work since the 1997 financial crisis has been argued to have inspired a change of work ethics, towards a more-realistic and self-centered way (Park & Kim, 2005). However, what is notable concerning this change of work ethic is that the change has not resulted in the decline of the logic of growth. Rather, the alternative logic of individualism has supported the logic of growth according to the findings of the current thesis. Employees who became more-realistic and self-centered stuck to the logic of growth even more strongly since

their employer's growth is the best guarantor of their job security. In this case the logic of individualism did not play a truly alternative role. This may support the view of Cho (1994) that in Korean culture individualism tends to lose itself in other forms of self-interested calculation.

Employees' response to the prevalence of the logic of growth

The links between macro and micro levels have received growing interest (McPherson & Sauder, 2013). However, much of this research has focused on organizational level responses; thus, knowledge on how institutional logics actually worked at individual level is still limited (Reay et al., 2006; Thornton et al., 2012).

The main contribution of the current thesis lies in confirming the influence of the logic of growth on members of the organization through the voices of employees themselves. The findings of the current thesis empirically showed that members of the business organization basically accept the notion that achieving high organizational growth thus contributing to national economic growth should function as a norm for their employer. In other words, they accepted the logic of growth as inevitable and saw compliance with it as a matter of legitimacy for their employer. From this perspective, the current thesis complements and further develops the finding of the existing studies (e.g. Ozen & Akkemik, 2012) which have maintained the view that contribution to national goals works as the norm for business organizations or their leaders.

Existing literature has explained employees' attitudes towards national or societal values in terms of compliance, internalization or identification. When employees are understood as internalizing national culture, they are basically treated as 'cultural dopes' (Lawrence et al., 2009; Powell & Colyvas, 2008), who have just been socialized into the national culture. Early neo-Institutional theory, which stressed isomorphism, was not different in this respect, a point which invited the criticism that it failed to provide a theory of agency. As an endeavor to overcome the criticism that this theoretical tendency was guilty of treating individuals as just 'carriers' (Zilber, 2002), the notion of 'institutional entrepreneurs', who are heroic change agents, was suggested. Institutional

entrepreneurs are individuals or organizational actors who have an interest in specific institutional patterns and who leverage resources to create new institutional arrangements or transform existing ones (DiMaggio, 1988; Fligstein, 1997, 2001; Garud, Jain & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Levy & Scully, 2007; Munir & Phillips, 2005). Now, individuals have two options in front of them, one is cultural dopes and the other is institutional entrepreneurs (Lawrence et al., 2009; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). However, the institutional entrepreneur perspective is not different in terms of its treatment of non-entrepreneurial actors since they still remain as passive consumers of what institutional entrepreneurs actively produce (Lok, 2010).

In this respect, the combination of the institutional logics perspective and sensemaking is helpful in overcoming deterministic views and understanding employees' agentive capacity more subtly. Although the influence of the societal logic of growth was seen to be dominant as discussed in the previous section, the current thesis also revealed that employees did sensemaking, which is a basically a back and forth process between internalization and externalization (Haraty, 2009). This mechanism is applicable to even highly legitimate logics, such as the dominant logic of growth in the context of the current thesis, thus it provides individuals with agentive capacity, through which they made sense of the reality of their employer, where it diverged from the dominant logic, to meet their social identity (Lok, 2010).

Likewise, the findings of the current thesis support both the structural nature of the institutional forces which constrain individual cognitions, and individuals' agentive capacity to make sense of employment reality in various ways. That is, although the growth narrative played a role as the dominant institutional logic in sensemaking their employer's growth slowdown and failure to contribute to national growth, each employee showed different, sometimes even contradictory understandings and attitudes towards the slowdown and failure of his or her employer. The current thesis does not aim for a clear-cut definition of sensemaking of employer branding, but strives for a 'rich' conception that allows me to recognise a number of different ways of sensemaking relating to the organization's employer branding.

A. Dominance of the logic of growth

The most evident characteristic in employees' response to the institutional logic of growth is its strong and prevalent influence on them. The dominance of the logic of growth can be confirmed in several points.

Employees generally accepted even the overuse of the logic of growth as matter-of-course regardless of their specific modes of sensemaking. The discourse of growth was often literally reproduced in a taken-for-granted manner and could be invoked to provide legitimacy for what might be seen as illegitimate or controversial issues. That is, although they noted the reality that growth exonerated other organizations' ill-doings or controversial behaviors, they considered this as inevitable. This was observable effectively in the reaction of employees to the fact that other high-status firms in the organization field were insulated from institutional pressures (Greenwood et al., 2011). Most employees suggested the viewpoint as that of the public rather than their own, yet they accepted it as natural.

B. Sensemaking of employer branding with reference to the dominant logic of growth

While most of employees were obsessed with growth, they showed a degree of freedom in sensemaking the growth slowdown and failure to contribute to national growth of their employer. Modes of sensemaking of organizational growth slowdown and failure to contribute were considerably diverse despite evident influence of the dominant logic of growth.

Sensemaking of employer branding in regard to organizational growth slowdown illustrated all five modes of sensemaking classified by Monin and coauthors (2013). Some employees, although a very limited number, (a) affirmed growth slowdown positively as new stage of stability, some (b) accepted growth slowdown passively, some (c) took a distanced view but most employees (d) resisted growth slowdown passively or (e) resisted growth slowdown actively as a fundamental threat to their pride as members of the organization.

Sensemaking of failure to contribute to the nation also showed varieties.

Individual employees have different strategies in sensemaking their employer's

failure to contribute although all of them perceive the importance of contribution to the nation strongly, under the influence of the institutional logic of growth. Employees (a) attempted to make sense of their employer's failure to contribute positively by arguing that their employer had committed to the nation by developing telecom infrastructure. Or some employees (b) passively justified their employer by pointing out that telecom service has been a relatively difficult sector to advance to the world market. By contrast, employees who made sense of the failure negatively (c) acknowledged it as failure but tried to emphasize continued efforts or (d) completely accepted the failure as a critical deficit of their employer.

To sum up, the embeddedness of individuals' sensemaking can be seen as neither an undersocialized (atomized), nor an oversocialized (completely internalized) concept, a situation which implies some capacity of individual agency (Granovetter, 1985). "Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy" (Granovetter, 1985: 487).

In the process of sensemaking, [social] identity works as the point of departure (Weick, 1995). Then, institutional logics provide social actors with vocabularies of motives and sense of self (Friedland & Alford, 1991). According to their identities, individuals were connected in diverse ways to the logic of growth. "Faced with events that disrupt normal expectations [i.e. organizational growth slowdown and failure to contribute to national growth in the context of the current thesis,] and, hence, the efficacy of established patterns of meaning and associated behavior, individuals attempt to make sense of ambiguous stimuli in ways that respond to their own identity needs" (Coopey, Keegan & Emler, 1997: 312). This is because "[d]epending on who I am, my definition of what is 'out there' will also change" (Weick, 1995: 20).

In the context of the current thesis, employees who resisted – passively or actively – growth slowdown and failure to contribute to national growth seemed to be primarily influenced by symbolic dimensions of organizational identity

(Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens et al., 2007). Symbolic needs broadly translate into perceptions and emotions about the abstract and intangible image of the organization, for example, employees' feelings of pride in the organization, the extent to which it gives them a sense of purpose, beliefs about its technical competence and honesty in dealing with clients and employees, the extent to which it is an exciting or innovative place to work, and the extent to which it is seen as chic, stylish and/or as aggressively masculine or competitive (Davies & Chun, 2003; Lievens, Van Hove & Schreurs, 2005). They made sense of the slowdown and the failure of their employer in terms of damage to their own pride since they identified with the dominant logic of growth. By contrast, employees who affirmed — positively or passively — organizational growth slowdown were primarily influenced by instrumental dimensions of organizational identity. Instrumental needs and expectations of employees refer to the objective, physical and tangible attributes that an organization may possess (Lievens, 2007; Lievens et al., 2007). They made sense of the growth slowdown as an issue of security.

Sensemaking as a retrospective process, which involves cues from their own, or from a colleague's past practice, was evident and this often contributes to enhancement of their self-pride (Weick et al., 2005). Most employees remembered the past as better times and this is primarily due to the high growth of their employer. In particular, employees looked back at the time when they joined the organization as the golden days, thus enhancing their feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy by projecting themselves as employees who entered the most popular company among prospective employees. Retrospective sensemaking of this sort exemplifies one of the multiple dimensions of agency identified by Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 971), 'iterative agency', which is oriented toward the past thus "selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action."

Sensemaking is also a prospective process, which materializes the identities and categories through which organizations and institutions come into existence (Weick et al., 2005). This type of sensemaking involves making sense of an idea about one's anticipated future practice. For example, employees made sense of

a future for their employer which dispenses with high growth as one which is similar to that of public corporations. Whereas some employees made sense of this as a relaxed and secure working life, some desired to dismiss such a shameful reality. This is again consonant with the second dimension of agency, projectivity, which concerns “an imaginative engagement of [the] future” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 984). As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 984) argued, “the formation of projects is always an interactive, culturally embedded process by which social actors negotiate their path toward the future.”

Embeddedness of organizational and industrial contexts into the logic of growth

A. Organization as a low-status sensegiver

Korean organizations basically draw their managerial culture from the state and state-promoted management policies. In this sense, they have not developed the local character of the corporate culture (Hamilton & Biggart, 1988). Findings of the current thesis have confirmed that the organization’s status as a sensegiver in respect to the dominant logic of growth was significantly low. It was largely embedded in the dominant logic and projected an image of the organization as an entity located in ongoing networks of social relationships that may involve the various actors of societal level, i.e. the state, religion and the family (Granovetter, 1985). By contrast, the degree of agency was very limited.

This finding of the current thesis is quite distinct from the majority view of the existing employer branding literature which assumes the status of the organization as the main sensegiver. Although a sensemaking perspective has not been adopted in employer branding literature, “the language of employer branding relies heavily upon a unitarist stance that treats employees as essentially consumers buying into their employer’s vision and corporate goals and brand or the cultural and symbolic cues which organizations attempt to signal” (Francis & Reddington, 2012: 270).

The sensemaking of the organization is an example of ‘restricted’ sensemaking, which produces a unitary but narrow account of reality, according to Maitlis (2005). It is subject to limited sensegiving by internal leaders and significant

sensegiving by external stakeholders (a situation which is likely to lead to 'fragmented' sensemaking according to Maitlis' original categorization). However, since there is limited and united external stakeholder sensegiving, primarily from the state, sensemaking of the organization is closer to the restricted form rather than the fragmented one.

According to the research findings, the organization's low status as a sensegiver was illustrated in the case of corporate vision and leadership of the organization. Firstly, the corporate vision of the organization, which was re-established in the interval between the two stages of fieldwork undertaken for the current thesis, was significantly embedded in the logic of growth. This embeddedness could be discussed in terms of two perspectives: On the one hand, data acquired from interviews with managers showed that the vision was renewed under the significant influence of the logic of growth. On the other hand, employees' embeddedness perceptions emerged which made sense of the vision of their employer as reflecting the logic of growth.

The former finding of embeddedness at the stage of enterprise planning and vision statements has been discussed in the existing literature. In particular, institutional theorists (e.g. Bartkus & Glassman, 2008; Germain & Cooper, 1990; Podolny, Khurana & Hill-Popper, 2005; Selznick, 1957) have highlighted the embeddedness of corporate vision or mission statements by approaching such statements as symbolic public declarations targeting external stakeholders rather than as representing an attempt to infuse the organization with meaning and purpose. To these theorists, corporate vision is primarily a vehicle that organizations use to signal their alignment with institutional pressure. Thus, decoupling between the vision and the practices of the organization may occur (Podolny et al., 2005).

The latter finding, of employees' perceptions of embeddedness, is novel and meaningful since whether employees perceive their employer's vision as embedded in societal context has been scarcely discussed in the literature. In addition, the finding shows that such perceptions of societal embeddedness did not automatically lead to the working of vision on employees. Although most employees perceived their employer's new vision as embedded in the dominant logic of growth, a logic by which they were also significantly influenced, and acknowledged that such embeddedness was inevitable, most of employees were

cynically disposed toward the vision. This suggests that the congruence of practices with the vision is required, in order for corporate vision to work as a vehicle to manage identity and image (Cheney et al., 2004). The organization would on this view have failed to “construct a discourse of corporate coherence”, which is “the primary task of management” through the re-established corporate vision (Araujo & Easton, 1996: 371). In other words, although the organization’s intended and official ‘autobiography’ through the content of the vision corresponds to the logic of growth, its unintended and often the most powerful ‘biography’ through the actual prospect of the organizational growth fails to meet the requirements of this logic (Martin & Hetrick, 2009; Mintzberg, 1994; Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Secondly, lack of leadership reflected the embeddedness of the organizational context into the dominant logic of growth. Perceptions of lack of leadership on the part of the current chairman of the organization were mainly due to employees’ evaluation that he has not been successful in leading the firm towards growth. This is in line with the fact that the success of the President of the nation is primarily evaluated in terms of economic growth in Korea (Cho, 2000). The importance of growth in leadership is also confirmed in the case of the previous chairman, whose perceived excellence in leadership largely originated from the fact that he showed foresight in decisions about what proved to be the future growth engines of company, the energy and telecommunication businesses, as emerges in the research findings. These are particularly noteworthy in that the leadership position and authority of a chairman from one of the founding families in the *Chaebol*, which has been understood as absolute, was revealed to depend to a significant degree on the societal logic of growth.

Whether he or she was perceived as CEO of growth or not was even more crucial in the leadership of professional executives who are non-members of the founding family. These findings are in line with the culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory (CLT), which proposes that effective leadership is in the eye of the beholder and the basic ways individuals perceive leaders are shaped by culture (Dorfman, Hanges & Brodbeck, 2004). More importantly, it suggests why current leaders of the organization have failed in the role of sensegiver. Scholars have, in fact, investigated how leaders engage in meaning-making activities

(Smircich & Morgan, 1982) through charismatic or transformational leadership (e.g. Bass, 1985; Bono & Judge, 2003; Bryman, 1993).

B. Industrial context

The research findings show that employees of the organization made sense of the industrial context, an area which has been studied in terms of ‘industry systems’ (Hirsch, 1972), ‘industry recipes’ (Spender, 1989), ‘organizational field’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and ‘industry culture’, under the dominant influence of the logic of growth (Chatman & Jehn, 1994). In other words, individuals’ sensemaking of the industrial context was embedded in the dominant logic of growth.

Firstly, service industry was generally understood, under the strong influence of the logic of growth, to be an inferior sort of economic activity. Manufacturing industries, which have led the rapid development of Korean economy through high growth and huge exports, work as the dominant reference under the influence of this logic. In the logic of growth, manufacturing paradigms are dominant and most features of service industry were evaluated negatively.

Secondly, the qualified pride felt by employees in being part of a technology service company shows the influence of the logic of growth as well. High tech industries in Asia including Korea, China, India and Taiwan have occupied a unique status (Miller, Lee, Chang & Breton-Miller, 2009) based on the state’s policies to develop these industries by priorities and they have generally fulfilled their expected roles in promoting national economic growth (Amsden & Chu, 2003; Saxenian, 2006).

Finally, these strong influences of the logic of growth at the industry level are confirmed in the unusual formation of the organizational field. Whereas organizational fields are generally formed by peer companies in the same industry (Lant & Baum, 1995), that of the case company was primarily formed by companies from different industries of manufacturing sector, e.g. company A or B. These exemplary companies, which have been understood to be contributing

to national economic development through high growth and huge exports, are assigned the role of ‘center’ of the organizational field regardless of specific industry, and the case company is at the ‘periphery’ of the organizational field (Wright & Zammuto, 2013). Actors located at the field center have the most commitment to and respect for the field's central values and rules whereas actors positioned at the field periphery have the least commitment and respect for values and rules (Wright & Zammuto, 2013).

This phenomenon can be discussed in terms of ‘social comparison’, an expression which was coined by Festinger (1954) (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Denrell, 2003). Greve (2008) argued that organizations interpret the adequacy of their own growth based on the performance of referent organizations.¹⁶ Social comparison is the process of mutual enactment, through which managers and members of organizations make sense of ambiguous information and reinforce shared beliefs, such as the logic of growth in the context of the current thesis (Porac et al., 1999). The choice of comparison group in this social comparison also reflects the strong influence of the logic of growth. Under the influence of this logic, employees of the organization chose the exemplary companies such as company A and B as referent companies instead of organizations in the same industry, which are generally chosen as comparison group (Lant & Baum, 1995).

Immanent individualism: Coexistence of growth logic and individualistic logic

In the previous section, the societal logic of growth was so dominant that the role of the logic of individualism as the alternative logic was confined. Even members of the organization accepted the logic of growth as a factor establishing the legitimacy of their employer, and the organization took no action as a sensegiver which controverted this logic. However, institutional logics are never frozen and stability is transitory even in highly institutionalized settings (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Hoffman, 1999). As an illustration, this chapter deals with more fluid aspects of the situation relating to the organization’s employer branding. The chapter concerns the coexistence of two

¹⁶Greve (2003) also suggested that organizations rely on historical comparison in evaluating their current level of organizational growth. In other words, an organization’s historical performance level acts as an anchor by which its current performance level is evaluated.

contending logics, which allowed more agentive capacity to individuals and the organization. Alternative institutional logics frame social reality differently (Lounsbury, 2008). The second ‘face’ of employer branding in the organization is significant since this controverts the existent dominant understanding of Korea as a monolithic context and provides more dynamic understanding of it.

Employees’ response to coexistence of contending logics

The findings of the current thesis showed that the coexistence of contending logics allowed individuals more space to maneuver than prevalence of a dominant logic did. This is a significant finding because there has been little research (e.g. Pache & Santos, 2013) on how members of organizations respond to contending logics, despite the importance of this point for the establishment of a microfoundation of institutional theory. Whereas individuals showed ‘passive agency’ in regard to growth obsession, the level of agency of individuals relative to immanent individualism was closer to ‘active agency’ (Oliver, 1991). In terms of three dimensions of agency identified by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), i.e. iterative, projective and practical-evaluative agency, practical-evaluative agency was embodied in most employees’ preference of the alternative logic of individualism. This dimension is oriented toward the present and corresponds to an actor’s capacity to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of actions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

This finding confirms Pache and Santos’s (2013) conceptual study, which suggested that the status of non-entrepreneurial actors would be established empirically midway between cultural dopes and institutional entrepreneurs. Also, the current thesis extends Lok’s (2010) work, which showed how specific professions reproduce and translate new institutional logics, by showing this in the context of the specific organization.

It has been noted that actors in a field have to make decisions about whether to stick with the old logic, embrace the new one, or figure out some way to hybridize (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Meyer & Hamersmich, 2006; Rao et al., 2003). Findings of the current thesis illustrated how members of the organization

may embrace the alternative logic or hybridize contending logics according to their identity or needs and made sense of the alternative logic accordingly.

The most evident employees' response to the alternative logic of individualism was 'active support' in the context of the current thesis. Actually, Western management practices have been posited as the 'rational' and inevitable option toward better management (Jang & Chung, 1997 cited in Lee, 1998). This tendency has become even stronger in post-financial crisis Korean society, and there has even been detected a sense of urgency to do away with traditional values and practices that hamper efficiency and competitiveness (Park & Kim, 2005).

In the case under investigation, since the dominant logic of growth was not fulfilled, some employees started to reject the logic of individualism. In repudiating the logic of individualism, they made sense of this alternative logic of individualism as paternalism, which is actually opposite to individualism as seen in the previous section of the current thesis. This corresponds to the 'compartmentalizing' of contending logics among individuals' various agentic strategies identified by Pache and Santos (2013). In Lok's (2010) study of UK investors' response to a new logic of shareholder value, individuals maintained their identity through compartmentalizing the new logic of shareholder value and practices of the old logic of managerialism or distancing their identity from the shareholder value logic. The compartmentalization identified in the current thesis is noteworthy since employees drew on the dominant logic of growth in rejecting the alternative logic of individualism. This shows that employees appropriated elements of different logics to meet the needs of their identity, and confirms again the dominance exercised over employees by the logic of growth.

Compartmentalization can be also understood as 'partial autonomy' (Benson, 1977), which is one of the concepts developed to address the paradox of embedded agency (Battilana & D'Annunzio, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002), which concerns the contradiction between institutional determinism and individual's agentic capacity. Although the degree of embeddedness of the dominant logic of growth was higher than that of the alternative logic of individualism, partial autonomy was observable. For example, employees recognized that the

employer needed to take an innovative approach to corporate vision, an approach which recognized the slowdown in the organization's growth; in taking a positive view of their employer's actions they were unconstrained by the logic of growth. 'Loosecoupling' (Powell, 1991), 'incomplete institutionalization' (DiMaggio, 1988), 'nested systems' (Holm, 1995), and 'mutability' (Clemens & Cook, 1999) are other examples of concepts which attempt, like 'partial autonomy', to address the paradox of embedded agency.

Table 6.3 Individuals' Relationship to Institutional Logics

	Novice	Familiar	Identified
Availability	0	+	+
Accessibility	0		+
Activation	0		+
	↓ Level of adherence: Null	↓ Level of adherence: Intermediate Ex) Logic of individualism	↓ Level of adherence: High Ex) Logic of growth

Source: Pache & Santos (2013:11)

It has been argued that individuals' degree of adherence to a logic influences their degree of awareness of the logic and their ability to take distance from it, resist it or alter it. Individuals' degree of adherence to a logic also decides the degree to which they are committed to it and the levels of difficulty they are willing to cope with to see it prevails (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Pache and Santos (2013) detailed the thread of argument by positing that individuals' responses to contending logics are driven by the individuals' degree of adherence to each logic.

The current thesis categorized employees' responses to contending logics as 'novice', 'familiar', or 'identified' according to Pache and Santos's categorization as Table 6.3. For example, employees' relationship to the logic of individualism belonged to intermediary level, 'familiar'. This means that, while the logic was available, this knowledge was only moderately accessible to employees. In other words, employees had knowledge and information about the logic of individualism, yet the logic did not necessarily come to their mind first. This is because employees had not built strong ties to the logic; thus, the activation of the logic is possible, yet not automatic. Although employees were

exposed to the logic, the degree to which they could be said to be embedded in it was low and/or they did not base their identity on the logic (Pache & Santos, 2013).

Individuals' relationship to the alternative logic of individualism can be understood more clearly through comparison with that which linked them to the dominant logic, growth. The logic of growth was highly available and accessible, thus highly activated. That is, employees were acquainted with the logic of growth and its organizing principles and felt emotionally and ideologically committed to it. The logic of growth defined not only what to do but also who he or she is, as well as how he or she relates with the rest of the world. Logic identification reinforced the taken-for-grantedness of the logic of growth, because it reinforced the perception of oneness between the self and the logic. In addition, employees operated in environments dominated by the logic of growth, thus the tie that they had developed with this logic determined their response to the logic (*ibid*).

Along with the individuals' degree of adherence to the logic, the current thesis particularly focuses on a contextual factor, i.e. the degree of hybridity of the context, which Pache and Santos noted as a factor moderating individual members' responses to logics. This factor refers to the degree to which the context in which individuals are involved is organized around the dominant logic and challenged by an alternative logic. The context of the current thesis is hybrid but the degree of hybridity is low, since dominance of the logic of growth over the alternative logic of individualism was significantly prominent. Thus, most employees identified with the logic of growth against that of individualism.

Dynamics of contending logics

As discussed above, two contending logics, the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism, coexisted in regard to individualistic aspects of employer branding when the former was satisfied. By contrast, when the former was not fulfilled, some employees depended on hybridized contending logics using the strategy of compartmentalization.

This changing relationship between two contending logics can be discussed in terms of dynamics of legitimacy and differentiation. The findings of the current thesis indicate a dynamic interrelation between legitimacy and differentiation. When the case company retains legitimacy, differentiation was accepted positively. However, once its legitimacy was questioned, the value of differentiation also started to be questioned. The finding is of significance since the paradox of legitimacy and differentiation, i.e. the combined pressures of institutions and market, have not been illuminated in terms of contending logics in the context of employer branding.

As discussed in the previous section, legitimacy plays a central role in neo-institutional theory as a force which homogenizes organizations' behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). By conforming to these socially constructed demands (Suchman, 1995), organizations can be rewarded by legitimacy, resources and survival (Scott, 2001; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). However, scholars argue that conforming to only institutional forces is insufficient and incorporation of seemingly conflicting differentiation is also required (Deephouse, 1999; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Oliver, 1992). This is because differentiation, supported by the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), increases the possibility of building competitive advantages thus tends to reduce rivalry.

Unlike the deterministic approach to institutional theory which posits an opposition between legitimacy and differentiation, some scholars have attempted a dualist approach. Organizations are required to differentiate themselves from their competitors to improve their competitive positioning, while they gain legitimacy (D'Aunno, Succi & Alexander, 2000; Deephouse, 1999; Delmas & Toffel, 2008; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Heusinkveld, Benders & Hillebrand, 2013; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Oliver (1991: 165) stated that "institutional theory can explain not only homogeneity and isomorphism in organizations, but also heterogeneity and variability of generated profits."

Deephouse (1999) developed strategic balance theory, which posits that moderately differentiated firms with a balance between an institutional focus and a market focus have higher performance than either highly conforming or highly differentiated firms. The concept of optimal distinctiveness (Navis &

Glynn, 2011; Whetten & Mackey, 2002) is also in line with strategic balance theory and studies applying this concept have provided empirical support. D'Aunno et al. (2000) further advanced strategic balance theory by arguing that that relative strengths and heterogeneity of institutional and differentiating pressure decide organizations' behaviours. That is, in the context where competition is high but which is institutionally heterogeneous, organizations tend to follow market forces and vice versa.

The findings of the current thesis support D'Aunno and coauthors' argument empirically by showing that the organization behaved in favour of legitimacy over differentiation in an attempt to seek optimal balance, since institutional pressure is higher than market competition for talent in the Korean context. Most branding activities of the organization, i.e. corporate branding and employer branding (other than product branding), primarily aimed for legitimacy rather than differentiation. By contrast, the need to differentiate employer branding was low since the labor market in Korea was homogeneous (thus low competition with foreign employers) and over-supplied, according to the findings of the current thesis.

Organization as a sensegiver

This part of the discussion looks at the organization as a sensegiver and considers the enabling factors of organizational agency in terms of two perspectives: characteristics of the organization and conditions outside of the organization.

The case company has demonstrated agency, if only to a limited degree, in regard to establishment of an organizational culture supporting the alternative logic of individualism. As described in the research context chapter, the case company has implemented organizational practices such as a simplified rank system and a casual dress code policy. The organization has a reputation as having a relatively horizontal organizational culture, as Korean companies go, and this has worked as one of its main propositions differentiating its employer branding.

This is in line with the view of Scott (1991: 170), who suggested that "organizations are not passive actors being imprinted by cultural templates."

Oliver (1991) also noted that organizations are not always passive but respond to institutional pressures according to their resource dependencies.

From the perspective that the organization has coped with two contending logics, it is unsurprising that some scholars have deployed the notion of hybrid organizations, defined as organizations that incorporate different institutional logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). The existence of hybrid organizations itself challenges the conceptualization of organizations as entities just reproducing a single institutional template in order to gain legitimacy and secure support from external institutional referents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Hybrid organizations exemplify how contending logics work in organizations and how the organizations and their members cope with the contradiction. Social enterprises are caught between market logics and social welfare logics and public-private partnerships are required to incorporate state, market and civil society logics (Jay, 2013), biotechnology companies incorporate science and market logics (Powell & Sandholtz, 2012) and medical schools deal with both health care and academic logics (Dunn & Jones, 2010). The case organization can be categorized as a hybrid organization in the sense that it incorporated two contending logics, the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism.

As enabler of organizational agency, the role of organizational characteristics has been noted by a host of researchers (Garud et al., 2002; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Leblebici et al., 1991; Rao et al., 2000). Most have emphasized particular organizational attributes, e.g. structure, ownership/governance, identity and position in the organizational field (Greenwood et al., 2011).

The findings of the current thesis have suggested management philosophy and history as important factors.

Firstly, the horizontal organizational culture of the organization was partially based on the corporate philosophy of T group, TMS, and this again originated from the founding chairman of T group, chairman B's management philosophy. He was the first businessman in Korea who studied Economics in the US and tried to implement a systematic management system. This is noteworthy, since the spread of American business ideology in Korean organizations has been

attributed to a generation of corporate executives and economic bureaucrats educated in US business schools (Hamilton & Biggart, 1988).

Secondly, the organization is relatively young compared with other *Chaebol* companies. Furthermore, the organization was formed as a result of M&A, thus the portion of career employees from various other organizations was bigger compared with non-M&A based organizations which have recruited employees primarily through the annual or biannual large scale open-recruitment system (*gongchae* in Korean). Therefore, the seniority-based system (*kisoo*), which is one of the main elements of hierarchical culture in Korean organizations, is less prominent in the organization.

Many institutional studies have also noted organizations' structural position within an organizational field as factor of organizational agency. There can be differences in the view taken on whether the organization is a central or a peripheral organization. In defining whether an organization is central or peripheral, three criteria, i.e. size, age and status, have been applied (Greenwood et al., 2011). In terms of size, the organization, which is the main subsidiary of large *Chaebol* and the largest mobile telecommunication service company in Korea, is definitely a central organization. However, the organization can be viewed as a peripheral organization in terms of status in the organizational field, which is structured on the basis of the logic of growth. Institutional studies generally suggested that organizations at the margins of an organizational field (Garud et al., 2002; Haveman & Rao, 1997; Leblebici et al., 1991) or at the interstices of different organizational fields (Rao et al., 2000; Levy & Egan, 2003) are more likely to act as institutional entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, some studies have showed that even central organizations can be institutional entrepreneurs since they are more likely to come into contact with contradictory logics and become immune to coercive and normative processes because their market activities expand beyond the jurisdiction of field-level regulations (Greenwood, Hinings & Suddaby, 2002; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001; Sherer & Lee, 2002).

Wider conditions outside the organization have been also discussed as enabling conditions for organizational agency. Firstly, many institutional theorists have

examined exogenous ‘jolts’ (Meyer, 1982) such as social upheaval, technological disruption, competitive discontinuity or regulatory change as possible stimuli of organizational agency (e.g. Clemens & Cook, 1999; Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & Mara-Drita, 1996; Greenwood et al., 2002; Holm, 1995; Oliver, 1991). Secondly, more endogenous factors like heterogeneity of institutional arrangements, i.e. variance in multiple institutional arrangements, has been argued to encourage agency (e.g. Clemens & Cook, 1999; D’Aunno et al., 2000; Lounsbury, 2007; Schneiberg & Soule, 2005; Seo & Creed, 2002; Sewell, 1992; Whittington, 1992). Lastly, there has been debate on the relationship between organizational agency and the degree of institutionalization of practices, values and norms. That is, Tolbert and Zucker (1996) argued that there is more room for organizations and individuals to act independently to the extent that institutions are not widely accepted, used and taken for granted. By contrast, Beckert (1999) maintained that innovative strategy is more likely occur in relatively highly institutionalized organizational fields where needs for security are reduced. Reconciling the last two factors, i.e. the heterogeneity or multiplicity of institutional arrangement and the degree of institutionalization, Dorado (2005) suggested that a substantial level of heterogeneous institutional arrangements and institutionalization (an ‘opportunity transparent’ milieu) facilitates agentic action. By contrast, other kinds of institutional environment – ‘opportunity opaque’ (isolated from the potential influence of other fields and/or highly institutionalized, thus less likely to promote new ideas), or ‘opportunity hazy’ (highly heterogeneous and minimal institutionalization, thus difficult for agents to grasp opportunities for action because of highly unpredictable environments) allow less capacity for agentic action.

In the context of the current thesis, the financial crisis in 1997 worked as a jolt at the societal level, causing change in organizational agency. Although there have been debates on whether Korea’s developmental state has been totally eclipsed or not in the aftermath of the financial crisis (e.g. Cherry, 2005; Chu, 2009), extensive state intervention is now a thing of the past (Cherry, 2005). By contrast, the economic power of *Chaebols* in Korea has become stronger (Kuk, 2010). In terms of Dorado (2005)’s classification, the Korean context can be evaluated as progressing from ‘opportunity opaque’ towards ‘opportunity

transparent' due to Westernization and globalization, a change which we can expect to favour organizational agency.

Chapter conclusion

The current chapter discusses employer branding of the organization in Korea focusing on employees' perceptions. In doing so, contending logics and sensemaking are adopted as primary theoretical perspectives. A contending logics perspective is effective in addressing societal context while overcoming determinism and the lack of historical and structural consideration of existing studies.

Growth obsession and immanent individualism are argued to constitute two contrasting dimensions of employer branding, outcomes of interaction of the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism.

The paradox of legitimacy and differentiation worked as an intermediate dynamics of the contending logics. Since institutional pressure is higher than market competition for talent in the Korean context, the balance between legitimacy and differentiation is achieved in favor of legitimacy.

The contending logics perspective deepens the understanding of Korean context as a hybridized one with contending logics of growth and individualism.

The current chapter provides more nuanced understandings on the role of individual employees as sensemakers of their employer's employer branding in two respects. On the one hand, construction of meaning by the agents is not done starting from scratch (Weber & Glynn, 2006) as illustrated by the strong influences of institutional logic at the societal level to which it is subject. On the other hand, employees still make sense of employer branding in diverse ways, rather than simply accepting the dominant institutional logic of growth. The availability of the alternative logic of individualism supports further individual agency since employees may choose which of the contending logics they rely on for social action and interaction (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

However, the role of the organization as a sensegiver is limited, by contrast with the significant influence of societal context on employees' sensemaking.

Chapter 7. CONCLUSION

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to contribute to the literature of employer branding. Three questions were used to provide focus for the research. These were:

Research Question 1. How do employees understand employer branding in the context of an organization in Korea?

Research Question 2. Which actors are the most influential in the employees' perceptions of employer branding? & Why?

Research Question 3. How does the organization mediate societal logics and employees' perceptions as a sensegiver?

In order to answer these questions, a research framework was applied which invoked two dimensions lacking in the extant employer branding literature, i.e. embeddedness and agency. A qualitative single case study strategy was adopted, against the background of a social constructionist approach. The main elements of the current thesis are as follows:

Summary

The thesis can be summarized in terms of four points: (a) employer branding as social construction by employees (b) adoption of contending logics perspective (c) roles of actors and (d) microfoundation of the paradox of legitimacy and differentiation.

Employer branding as social construction by employees

I approached employer branding from a social constructionist stance. The social constructionist basis provided a strong ground to challenge the dominant view of employer branding as an employer-driven strategy, in which the employees' roles are confined to simple 'deliverer of brand' or 'living the brand' in a way which, paradoxically, calls for no input or agency from the employees themselves (Karmark, 2005; Tarnovskaya, 2011). The social constructionist stance shifted the focus of employer branding from the meso level of

organization to the micro level of employees who enacted a certain agency reflecting multiple and even contending logics at the societal level (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Adoption of a contending logics perspective

The virtues of social constructionism in the context of the thesis, alluded to above, were further strengthened by the use of a contending logics perspective. By analyzing the societal influences on individuals in terms of the interaction of two contending logics, the thesis overcomes the determinism and failure to engage with history which vitiates the conventional approach based upon national cultures. This point is explained further using two contexts, i.e. the area of employer branding and the Korean experience, as follows:

A contending logics perspective & employer branding

Drawing the contending logics perspective into employer branding, the thesis considers employer branding in terms of interaction between macro- and micro-levels of analysis, thus seeking to escape the deterministic tendency detectable in existing studies, e.g. national culture studies.

On the one hand, the dominant logic of growth at the societal level was significantly influential in how employees understood their organization's employer branding. Under the influence of the logic of growth, employees perceived growth slowdown in the organization and its failure to contribute to national growth as the most important features of the company's employer branding. The alternative logic of individualism at the societal level was also influential, thus employees perceived non-hierarchical organizational practices as a humane aspect of their company's employer branding.

In this fashion, employees' sensemaking of employer branding was embedded in the societal logics of growth and individualism. In contrast, the organization's influence on it was limited. These findings refute head-on the existing employer branding literature (e.g. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Mosley, 2007), whose main representatives have assumed that employer branding is entirely in employers' hands.

On the other hand, employees showed agentive capacity in the ways they made sense of employer branding in relation to the two identified logics at the societal level. That is to say, employees translated these logics as well as reproducing them when they made sense of the organization's employer branding. In regard to the dominant logic of growth, employees tended to reproduce the logic rather than translate it, showing limited agentive capacity. The agentive aspect was more observable in regard to the alternative logic of individualism, which employees more often translated.

By adopting the contending logics perspective to employer branding, the employer branding concept was extended, suggesting that it can function as an linking concept which illustrates the relationship between structural and agentive explanations in employment relations research. Current research in this field has been criticized, on the one hand for failing to extend analysis 'beyond the factory gates' while on the other for failing to recognize the micro-foundations of institutional systems (Thornton et al., 2012). This thesis has attempted to demonstrate the value of such analysis in employment relations research.

Contending logics perspective & Korean context : Hybrid elements in the Korean context

The contending logics perspective elucidates the hybridity of the Korean context. The Korean context has been understood primarily as collectivistic and hierarchical following Hofstede and coauthors' works (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Although coexistence of contradictory dimensions in the Korean organizational context has been noted, and some writers have identified new social and cultural constellations including 'dynamic collectivism' (Cho & Park, 1998; Cho & Yoon, 2002), the hybridity of the Korean context at societal level has not been studied in earnest.

By drawing on the contending logics perspective and identifying the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism as specific logics, the thesis advances understanding of the hybridity of Korean context.

Roles of actors

The findings of the thesis presented novel views on the roles of actors encompassing employer branding.

Individuals

Employees' perceptions of employer branding showed both embeddedness (into societal context) and agency. On the one hand, employees were within the influence of societal-level logics as they sought to make sense of their company's employer branding. The logics of growth and individualism worked as frames of reference in perceiving employer branding. On the other hand, employees showed capacity as agents in the sensemaking process. They used the alternative logic of individualism to make sense of the gap between their organization's reality and the dominant logic of growth. In addition, they hybridized the logic of individualism with elements of the logic of growth to reject the former. To sum up, individuals through their institutional work managed the tensions between their embeddedness and limited agency, which reflected the strength of institutional logics and their social identity rather than either completely internalizing social values or approaching their social situation in a deculturated way as atomic individuals.

The state

The influence of the societal level, the state in particular, on employees' sensemaking of employer branding was the most significant of those examined. From this perspective, the thesis reaffirms the influence of the continuing effectiveness of societal [national] profile. However, a more nuanced approach was required to attain pertinent understanding of roles of societal context. Although the Korean state was no longer the strong developmental state which allocated resources for investment and directly regulated capital movement, the logic of growth at the societal level continued to work through normative or cognitive dimensions rather than the coercive dimension. The path dependency of developmentalism and the support of the alternative logic of individualism were suggested as the reasons accounting for the persistent influence of the

state in employees' sensemaking of employer branding. Although the thesis does not aim for generalizability, the finding confirmed in the context of the large organization is compelling and suggests a key to the better understanding of Korean society in general.

Organizations

The status of the organization as a sensegiver in the thesis was very limited. In regard to the dominant logic of growth, the independent voice of the organization was almost nil. Concerning the alternative logic of individualism, it showed agentic capacity. However, this was conditional on the satisfaction of the dominant logic of growth. This low status of the organization as a sensegiver controverts directly the dominant tendency of the 'employer- driven' stance in the existing employer branding literature (e.g. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Mosley, 2007).

Microfoundation of the paradox of the legitimacy and differentiation

The current thesis shows how the dilemma between legitimacy and differentiation works in the context of employees. The existing understanding on this dilemma has been confined to the macro-meso level relationship, which operates in such a way that organizations are supposed on certain assumptions to strategically balance pressure from institutions and market according to given conditions. What this thesis reveals is that the dilemma also influences employees as well. That is, when legitimacy was satisfied through high organizational growth, differentiation through non-hierarchical organizational culture was appreciated; however, when the former was not met, the latter was rejected by some employees. Since the former is based on the dominant logic of growth and the latter reflects the alternative logic of individualism, the microfoundation of this paradox at the same time exemplifies the dynamics between contending logics.

Contribution

The contributions of the thesis to the literature are as outlined below:

1. Illuminating employer branding from the perspective of institutional logics, thus locating it in the societal context.

: By drawing in innovative fashion upon the institutional logics approach, the thesis extends the scope of employer branding literature from an organization-only focus into the societal level.

2. Suggesting employee's agency in regard to employer branding by approaching employer branding as employee's social construction.

: At the same time, the thesis illuminates employer branding from the perspective of employees; using a social constructionist perspective, it highlights employee agency in making sense of employer branding (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

3. Overcoming a deterministic approach to the role of societal context.

: The combination of contribution 1 and 2, therefore, locates employer branding amid the interaction between micro-macro levels of analysis, questioning current tendencies to see societal context as overwhelmingly determinative.

Data on how employees understood and constructed the employer branding of their organization emerged in their own words, with minimum level of direct prompt from the researcher. The data thus elicited vividly illustrated the significant influence of societal context on employees' sensemaking of their organization's employer branding. These naturally occurring data have an independent value which provides compelling evidence of a linkage of micro-macro levels operating in the area of employer branding, while overcoming the dominant deterministic approach to national or societal context.

4. Arguing against the dominant assumption of existing employer branding literature in regard to organizations' role as a sole sensegivers of employer branding.

: Using an approach to the data at multiple levels allows the thesis to question the role of the organization as the dominant sensegiver of employer branding. By addressing the individual level (in its close connection with the societal level) and the organizational level, contrasting influences of the societal and organizational levels on individuals are revealed. Compared with the significant influence of the societal level, that of the organization is limited. Based on this observation, the thesis argues that the role of the organization as sensegiver has

been accorded too much importance in most of the existing employer branding literature.

5. Suggesting growth and individualism as contending logics in respect to employer branding in Korea.

: The thesis deepens the understanding of the hybridity of Korean context by suggesting the dominant logic of growth and the alternative logic of individualism as contending logics.

6. Providing a microfoundational account of the paradox of legitimacy and differentiation.

: The thesis shows how the dilemma between legitimacy and differentiation works in the context of employees. Whereas the existing understanding of the dilemma has been confined to the macro-meso level relationship, in which organizations supposedly strategically balance pressure from institutions and market, the thesis reveals that the dilemma also influences employees as well.

Limitations of the study

I am bound to acknowledge limitations in this research, of which the single-case design can be seen as the most important. By adopting a single case study approach, statistical generalizability has been precluded. However, contextually rich data sources associated with a single case allow theory building (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Kluwe, 1995), as I hope I have demonstrated.

Another limitation of my research is its single-country focus. Although the thesis discusses at a conceptual level how developmental countries uniquely utilized the growth discourse, it limits study to a country with a developmental polity, Korea, without empirical comparison with liberal countries. This is based on the rationale that a focused research in the context of Korea provides a holistic opportunity to see how employer branding is embedded in societal logics. Furthermore, the combination of the case study approach in the context of Korea, which provides a strong institutional basis, and the social constructionist foundation, which focuses on individual's construction, enables a novel approach that links micro-macro levels of analysis. A future comparative study may provide insights about micro-macro level linkages encompassing employer

branding in different contexts. I hope that the findings of this study encourage future studies on this issue.

Thirdly, from a positivist perspective, self-reported data based on perceptions rather than actual, objectively verified data can be pointed out as a limitation of the thesis. However, this is one of the strengths rather than limitations according to social constructionism, which informs the thesis. Social constructionism primarily concerns “how knowledge is socially constructed in communities” (Hruby, 2001: 58) thus the world we live in is not simply ‘out there’, rather participants “actively construct the world of everyday life in the interaction with society” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 3).

Lastly, although the thesis provides data with a longitudinal element, they are based on two points of time, and thus insufficient to address process concerns. Still, availability of two stages of fieldwork made it possible to observe changes in employees’ sensemaking of employer branding and in the organization’s employer branding strategy, enabling me to address most of the issues which would remain inaccessible to a purely synchronic approach.

Implications for further research

The thesis suggests questions deserving future research. Potential research areas are outlined below, together with the contributions anticipated in each case:

1. Addressing certain criticisms of human resource management and employment relations research by locating organizational level analysis in meso and macro level institutions, and by showing how these levels of analysis are recursively related.

: The **potential research area 1** can be expected to enrich employer branding and HRM research as dynamic areas comprehending multiple levels of analysis.

2. Fully addressing employer branding as a process by conducting a longitudinal study based in more than two stage points.

: Extending the research design by adding a longitudinal study should help deepen our understanding of how societal logics work at the individual level and

how the individual level recursively influences organizational and societal levels over time.

3. Further research on employer branding of more typical Korean companies to extend the findings of the thesis into large Korean companies in general.

4. Further research on employer branding of non-*Chaebol* companies in Korea to consider whether a higher degree of legitimacy in terms of corporate governance leads to a more differentiation-oriented approach to employer branding or not.

: The **potential research areas 3 and 4** should contribute to an understanding of employer branding in Korean companies, which is more generalizable and thus has greater power.

5. Further research linking employer branding and talent management in the context of Korea.

: This should enable me to confirm whether the findings of the thesis, in particular regarding embeddedness and agency of employer branding, can find application in an adjacent area of talent management or not.

Implications for practice

Employer branding has been embraced not only by academics but also by practitioners as it provides a means of integrating the tools of HR with the overall strategy of the organization. Similarly this thesis has a number of outcomes and recommendations for practitioners, outlined below:

1. Raising the importance of approaching employer branding with an understanding and awareness of the societal context.
2. Extending understanding of employer branding as a sensemaking process, in which employees play a role as sensemaking agents. In parallel with **implication 1**, the thesis shows that employees sensemake against the background of societal influence. Therefore, the main practical implication of the thesis lies in serving to alert the field that employer branding is not just an employer-driven strategy by casting light on both influence of societal logics on employer branding and employee agency.
3. Suggesting the conflict between the logics of growth and individualism as a frame to understand Korean hybrid context.
4. Informing strategies for MNEs to penetrate Korean [job] market in terms of legitimacy and differentiation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Interview questions

For Employee participants

1st stage

- What comes into your mind when you think of your employer? Why do you think this image or ideas comes into your mind first?
- Could you talk about your experiences of work in the organization since joining?
- What are your main expectations from a good employer?
- Have your most valued expectations been met?

2nd stage

- You mentioned that _____ is important in your employer branding of your employer in the previous interview. How have your image and ideas concerning your employer changed?
- What do you think primarily influences the imagery and ideas you associate with your employer? Why do you think so?

For Manager participants

1st stage

Common questions

- What are the characteristics and contents of employer branding of your organization?
- How does it come about that your organization takes this approach to employer branding?
- Which aspects of employer branding does your organization aim to reinforce? To achieve this, which specific steps does your organization intend to take?

For HR managers

- What are the characteristics of characteristics of your workforce?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- Where did those characteristics come from?
- What is your organization's approach to human resources?

For other managers

- How are the activities of your office related to your organization's employer branding?

2nd stage

Common questions

- Which aspect of your company's employer branding appeal to employees the most nowadays?

For HR managers

- Your company's vision was overhauled recently. What are the new directions of HR and employer branding strategy? Why did you choose the strategy?

For other managers

- Your company's vision was overhauled recently. What are the new directions of strategy related to your organization's employer branding? Why did you choose the strategy?

Appendix B. Employer branding literature

Table.2.4 Employer branding literature

EB literature	Ontological & Epistemological assumptions	Societal influence	Employee's role
Aggerholm, H. K., Andersen, S. E. and Thomsen, C. (2011), Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organizations, <i>Corporate Communications: An International Journal</i> , 16, 105-123.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Conceptual paper · "...the employer brand should not be considered a pre-existing and separate entity to communication but rather constitutive within and brought into being through communicative processes" (P.106) · "...we argue that there is a need to apply more stakeholder and relationship thinking to employer branding in support of the paradigmatic understanding of the concept within a social-constructivist tradition" (P.106) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Critical of the fact that most of EB literature is framed "without consideration for the societal demand of corporate sustainability" (p.108) · "...we argue that a reconceptualization of employer branding draws on the three theoretical fields of branding, HRM and CSR defined within a paradigm of social constructivism from which the concept of co-creation emerges" (P. 110). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · "This perspective paves the way for reconceptualizing employer branding as a question of co-constructing and negotiating values between management and employees/potential employees" (P.113) · "...future research should focus on: Employees as key stakeholders rather than means or channels to fulfill brand promise to external stakeholders..."(P.117)
Ambler, T. and Barrow, S. (1996), The employer brand, <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , 4, 185-206.	Defining EB as "the package of...benefits..." (P.187)	N/A	The main aim of EB is to achieve better corporate performance via ensuring meeting the employees' own objectives(p.185)

Andreassen, T. W. and Lanseng, E. J. (2010), Service differentiation: A self-image congruency perspective on brand building in the labor market, <i>Journal of Service Management</i> , 21, 212-236.	Criticizing the attribute-by attribute approach based on the use of predetermined lists as atomistic (P. 214, 218, 224)	Including subjective social norms as a variable in the conceptual model of EB (P.215)	Employee as a co-creator (with customer) of and center to a company's market offerings (P.213, 214)
Arnold, J., Coombs, C., Wilkinson, A., Loan-Clarke, J., Park, J. and Preston, D. (1996), Corporate images of the United Kingdom national health service: Implications for the recruitment and retention of nursing and allied health profession staff, <i>Corporate Reputation Review</i> , 6, 223-238.	Understanding EB as easy or difficult for employer to control (P. 225)	The media is the most influential source of image of the organization (NHS) (p.231-232)	Simple perceiver
Backhaus, K. (2004), An Exploration of corporate recruitment descriptions on Monster.com, <i>Journal of Business Communication</i> , 41, 115-136.	Attempting to establish categories of the information presented in recruitment advertisings, as a way to improve understanding of the objective factors of employer attractiveness (P.117-118)	N/A	Perceiver
Backhaus, K. and Tikoo, S. (2004), Conceptualizing and researching employer branding, <i>Career Development International</i> , 9, 501-517.	Conceptual paper	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Deliverer ·A tool for managers to “channel different employee recruitment and retention activities into a coordinated human resource strategy” (P.513) ·Requesting managers to be “proactive” to prevent potential employees from developing an EB associations based on information sources that are not employer-controlled (P.506)
Baum, M. and Kabst, R. (2013),	·Attempting to ‘examine’ influences		

How to attract applicants in the Atlantic versus the Asia-Pacific region? A cross-national analysis on China, India, Germany, and Hungary, <i>Journal of World Business</i> , 48, 175-185.	of EB image dimensions on application intentions ·Suggesting identification of causal relationships among them as an area to study further (P.182)	Examining differences in EB image dimensions which influence on application intentions at national level	Perceiver
Berthon, P., Ewing, M. and Hah, L. L. (2005), Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding, <i>International Journal of Advertising</i> , 24, 151-172.	Attempting to develop scales of attractiveness of EB as a part of an 'employer brand template' which can be applied regardless of contexts (p.168)	N/A	·Deliverer ·Approaching EB mainly in terms of communication (advertising) to employees, thus employees are internal audience of EB (P.152-153)
Cushen, J. (2011), 'The trouble with employer branding: Resistance and disillusionment at Avatar' In Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E. and Priola, V. (Eds), <i>Branded Lives</i> . Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.	Criticizing the presumed unitary perspective of the existing EB literature as illusion	N/A	·Resistant stakeholder ·Brand recipient (critical)
Davies, G. (2008), Employer branding and its influence on managers, <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> , 42, 667-681.	Showing that each type of association of EB has specific role such as differentiation, affinity, satisfaction and loyalty, although admitting dyadic relationship does not exist	N/A	Objects to be influenced by specific aspects of EB personality (P.669)
Edwards, M. R. (2010), An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory, <i>Personnel Review</i> , 39, 5-23.	Literature review	N/A	N/A
Edwards, M. R. and Edwards, T. (2013), Employee responses to changing aspects of the employer brand following a multinational acquisition: A longitudinal study, <i>Human</i>	Hypothesis testing approach	N/A (Despite multinational study)	Perceiver

<i>Resource Management</i> , 52, 27-54.			
Edwards, M. R. and Kelan, E. K. (2011), 'Employer branding and diversity: foes and friends?' In Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E. and Priola, V. (Eds), <i>Branded Lives</i> . Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.	N/A	Arguing engaging and integrating the interests of employees in the process of designing EB as socially responsible employer branding which meets social pressure for CSR credentials (P.177)	Central stakeholder (P.177)
Ewing, M. T., Pitt, L. F. and de Bussy, N. M. and Berthon, P. (2002), Employment branding in the knowledge economy, <i>International Journal of Advertising</i> , 21, 3-22.	N/A	N/A	Suggesting employees as stakeholders of EB
Foster, C., Punjaisri, K. and Cheng, R. (2010), Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding, <i>Journal of Product & Brand Management</i> , 19, 401-409.	Conceptual paper	N/A	"Through employer branding activities, organizations can attract the calibre of employee needed to improve performance" (P.408).
Francis, H., and Reddington, M. (2012), 'Employer Branding and Organisational Effectiveness' in Francis, H., Holbeche, L. and Reddington, R. (eds), <i>People and Organisational Development: A New Agenda for Organisational Effectiveness</i> . London: CIPD.	Critical realism (P.261)	Asking sensitivity to the wider socio-political context in which (discursively mediated) management practices are enacted (p.263)	Criticizing the EB literature's heavy reliance on "a unitarist stance that treats employees as essentially <i>consumers</i> buying into their employer's vision and corporate goals and brand or the cultural and symbolic cues which organizations attempt to signal, rather than <i>producers</i> of HR practices or corporate brand" (P.270)
Knox, S. and Freeman, C. (2006), Measuring and managing employer brand image in the service industry, <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> , 22, 695-716.	Quantifying overall attractiveness of employer as scores	N/A	·Employees have become critical to the firm's ability to differentiate in the service industries ·Perceiver of EB attributes
Lievens, F. (2007),			

Employer branding in the Belgian Army: The importance of instrumental and symbolic beliefs for potential applicants, actual applicants, and military employees, <i>Human Resource Management</i> , 46 51-69.	Hypothesis testing approach	Considering Belgian army context	Perceiver
Lievens, F., Van Hove, G. and Anseel, F. (2007), Organizational identity and employer image: towards a unifying framework, <i>British Journal of Management</i> , 18, S45-S59.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · “Finally, future studies should pay attention to the dynamic aspect of organizational identity by examining how outsiders’ image of the organization influences insiders’ organizational identity and vice versa. Similarly, image perceptions might be temporally affected by negative publicity. Recently, Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) have proposed that, because of the reciprocal interrelationships between identity and image, organizational identity is better viewed as a relatively fluid and unstable concept” · “The questionnaire-based method adopted in this study might be less appropriate to uncover these complex relationships and several researchers have proposed and developed qualitative-oriented methods for this type of research question” (S.56) 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Perceiver ·Authors acknowledged in limitations by stating “the current study did not look into these differences and assumed that all employees were equally attracted by the same identity components”(P.S56)
Martin, G. Beaumont, P., Doig, R. and Pate, J. (2005), Branding: A New Performance Discourse for HR? <i>European Management</i>	Defining EB as the “company’s image as <i>seen through the eyes</i> of its associates and potential hires” (P.78)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Stakeholder (p.80) · “the pivotal role employees play in reifying the brand through a close identification with the goals of the

<i>Journal</i> , 23, 76-88.			organisation and a strong personal commitment to its values” (P.81)
Martin, G., Gollan, P. J. and Grigg, K. (2011), Is there a bigger and better future for employer branding? Facing up to innovation, corporate reputations and wicked problems in SHRM, <i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 22, 3618-3637.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Conceptual paper ·Defining EB in terms of “a generalised recognition” rather than assuming an entity which managements intend 	Re-establishing an aim of EB as procurement of social capital as well as human capital by allowing employees to find EB strategies meaningful for themselves. In the change the roles of EB, authenticity and the local are central (p.3631)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Defining EB stressing the involvement of stakeholders including employees in the process of EB ·Arguing the need for EB to overcome traditional approach as “something that is designed by HR, marketing or corporate communications departments for others” and to move towards “helping employees socially construct employer brands which are locally responsive and authentic” (P.3631)
Martin, G. and Cerdin, J. L. (2014), ‘Employer branding and career theory: New directions for research’ in Sparrow, P., Scullion, H. and Tarique, I. (eds), <i>Strategic Talent Management: Contemporary Issues in International Context</i> . Cambridge University Press.	Conceptually criticizing the dominance of functionalist perspective in EB research (P.292)	Suggesting importance of multi-disciplinary employer branding studies to address complexity of national institutions (P.291)	Suggesting different levels of employee engagement might be mutually constitutive (P.292)
Maxwell, R. and Knox, S. (2009), Motivating employees to “live the brand”: A comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm, <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> , 25, 893-907.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Open to possibility that there are differences in specific attributes employees perceive the most attractive according to organizations and whether they are current or prospective employees, yet confirming that there is consistency in categories of attributes (P.893, 897, 904) ·Critical about the best practice approach since it cannot reflect distinctive organizational identity (p. 	N/A	Highlighting employees as “live the brand”

	895)		
Moroko, L. and Uncles, M. D. (2008), Characteristics of successful employer brands, <i>Brand Management</i> , 16, 160-175.	Assuming that there are certain characteristics of successful or unsuccessful EB and identifying them (P.163)	N/A	Interviewing brand, HR and communication consultants
Mosley, R. (2007), Customer experience, organisational culture and the employer brand, <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , 15, 123-134.	·Conceptual paper ·Approaching EB as achievable through shaping organizational culture (P.123)	N/A	Engaged frontliners who deliverer distinctive brand customer experiences after experiencing integrated employment life.
Schlager, T., Bodderas, M., Maas, P. and Cachelin, F. L. (2011), The influence of the employer brand on employee attitudes relevant for service branding: an empirical investigation, <i>Journal of Service Marketing</i> , 15, 497-508.	Attempting to verify direct relationship between specific dimensions of EB and employees' satisfaction and identification	N/A (Despite multinational study)	Perceivers
Smith, D. A. (2011), Branding consent: The role of employer brand in retail labor process control, PhD thesis, <i>The University of Minnesota</i> .	The influence researcher's social identity on the research was acknowledged.	The structural context of workers' status vulnerability was considered.	Resistant of labor control
Smith, S. and Buchanan-Oliver, M. (2011), 'The branded self as paradox: Polysemic readings of employee-brand identification' In Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E. and Priola, V. (Eds), <i>Branded Lives</i> . Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.	"[F]raming the organizational brand as a socially constructed text" (P.60)	N/A	Constructor of paradoxical and complex brand experience
Tarnovskaya, V. V. (2011), 'The brand I call home? Employee-brand appropriation at IKEA' in Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E. and	Acknowledging that data of the study as "situational, localized and partial"	N/A	"Active constructors of brand meaning" (P.129)

Priola, V. (eds), <i>Branded Lives</i> . Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.	(P.133)		
Wilden, R., Gudergan, S. and Lings, I. (2010), Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment, <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> , 26, 56-73.	Attempting to identify factors of employer attractiveness	N/A	Perceivers